

NEW  
*CHALLENGE*

•  
A LITERARY  
QUARTERLY

Benjamin Appel

Verna Arvey

Serling Brown

Frank Marshall Davis

Robert Davis

Owen Dodson

Ralph Ellison

Charles Henri Ford

Clarence Hill

Valdemar Hill

Eugene Holmes

Langston Hughes

Allyn Keith

George Linn

Alain Locke

Norman Macleod

Marian Minus

Henry Moon

Margaret Walker

Richard Wright

FALL 1937 . . . 25c

# NEW CHALLENGE

## A Literary Quarterly

VOLUME II

FALL 1937

NUMBER II

### CONTENTS

Editorial .....	3
Letters .....	5
Stories	
Asylum of a Century's Silence—Norman Macleod .....	7
As a Friend—Benjamin Appel .....	12
Jessie's Mother—Valdemar Hill .....	18
When Ladies Legislate—George B. Linn .....	26
The Canny Cannibal—Clarence Hill .....	36
Poetry	
Snapshots of the Cotton South—Frank Marshall Davis .....	40
Old Lem—Sterling A. Brown .....	46
From Those Shores We Have Come—Owen Dodson .....	48
War—Charles Henri Ford .....	48
South Chicago, May 30, 1937—Robert Davis.....	49
Four Poems—Margaret Walker .....	49
Song for Youth—Anthony Lespes .....	51
<i>translated by Langston Hughes</i>	
Articles	
Blueprint for Negro Writing—Richard Wright .....	53
A Note on Negro Nationalism—Allyn Keith .....	65
Problems Facing the Negro Writer Today—Eugene Holmes .....	69
The Ballets of William Grant Still—Verna Arvey .....	75
Reviews	
<i>A Long Way From Home</i> —Alain Locke .....	81
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> —M. M. ....	85
<i>American Stuff</i> —Henry Lee Moon .....	88
<i>These Low Grounds</i> —Ralph Ellison .....	90
A Share-cropper's Letter .....	92
Contributors .....	93

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NEW CHALLENGE: Published quarterly, 25c a copy; \$1.00 a year. Copyright 1937 by Dorothy West. No reprint may be made without permission of the editors. Make all checks payable to NEW CHALLENGE, 371 West 117th Street, N. Y. C.

## EDITORIAL

We envisage *New Challenge* as an organ designed to meet the needs of writers and people interested in literature which cannot be met by those Negro magazines which are sponsored by organizations and which, therefore, cannot be purely literary. Through it we hope to break down much of the isolation which exists between Negro writers themselves, and between the Negro writer and the rest of the writing world. We hope that through our pages we may be able to point social directives and provide a basis for the clear recognition of and solution to the problems which face the contemporary writer.

We are not attempting to re-stage the "revolt" and "renaissance" which grew unsteadily and upon false foundations ten years ago. A literary movement among Negroes, we feel, should, first of all, be built upon the writer's placing his material in the proper perspective with regard to the life of the Negro masses. For that reason we want to indicate, through examples in our pages, the great fertility of folk material as a source of creative material.

We want *New Challenge* to be a medium of literary expression for all writers who realize the present need for the realistic depiction of life through the sharp focus of social consciousness. Negro writers themselves and the audience which they reach must be reminded, and in many instances taught, that writing should not be *in vacuo* but placed within a definite social context.

The reorganization of the magazine has been carried through, not only with the idea of a change in policy, but also in terms of the best way to fulfill our plans for relating it to communities beyond New York City. We want to see *New Challenge* as the organ of regional groups composed of writers opposed to fascism, war and general reactionary policies. There is already one such group functioning in Chicago, and we are eager to see other groups in other



cities follow this example. Contributing editors from several large cities have been selected in the hope that the organizational activity of groups in those areas will be facilitated.

The success of this magazine depends upon the avoidance of any petty restrictions with regard to policy. We want it to be an organ for young writers who are seriously concerned with the problems facing them in their defense of existing culture and in their sincere creation of higher cultural values.

While our emphasis is upon Negro writers and the particular difficulties which they must meet, we are not limiting our contributors to Negroes alone. Any writer dealing with materials which reflect a sincere interest in the ultimate understanding of the interdependence of cultures will be welcomed. The magazine is one for progressive writers, and adheres to the prescriptions of no one dogma. We do ask, however, that the bigot and potential fascist keep away from our door.

The magazine, being non-political, is not subsidized by any political party, nor does it receive huge contributions from any such group (or from individuals). We are dependent upon subscriptions, support of benefit affairs, and outright donations. We are, in this respect, responsible only to ourselves, a fact which is contrary to the belief of the skeptics and agonizing to our enemies. But we recognize our obligations to our friends and advisers and to our sincere critics; and we hope that we shall prove our multiple sense of responsibility.

*The Editors*

## LETTERS

DONALD OGDEN STEWART, president of the League of American Writers, sends a donation from Los Angeles "as a token of my desire to help *New Challenge* in every way possible" . . . CHARLES S. JOHNSON writes from Fisk, "I am very much interested in the group of young writers who are finding expression, and I want to give them the benefit of my encouragement and any direct assistance which they feel will be helpful . . . I should be glad to attempt for you an article dealing with southern folk-lore . . . There are new voices with which I have not been personally acquainted, and look forward with a great deal of interest to the opportunity of meeting" . . . EDWARD J. O'BRIEN whose letter reached us during our recent reorganization, wrote from England, "I shall be glad to consider the stories in *Challenge* regularly for the *Best Short Stories* if you care to add my name to your mailing list . . ." (This letter was unsolicited, and we hope that he will make the same response to *New Challenge*.) . . . ARNA BONTEMPS, author of *Black Thunder*, writes from Chicago, "Though I am overworked, I'll be most eager to help and support the newly incarnated magazine . . . I also have a million or two ideas" . . . CAROLYN MARX columnist on the *New York World-Telegram*, sends "Good Luck to *New Challenge*" . . . MORTON FREEDGOOD, a contributor to old *Challenge*, and one of the writers included in *New Letters in America*, writes from New York, "I am very happy to hear that you have new and ambitious plans for the magazine, and I hope that it prospers. I think that the introduction of social material will give it the necessary punch that it might have lacked in the old form" . . . O'WENDELL SHAW, author of *Greater Need Below*, writes from Toledo, Ohio, "I do hope that the *New Challenge Quarterly* will find it possible to become the organ for that group (writers' guild). A national Negro writers guild appeals to me, regardless of who promotes and heads it" . . . FRANK MARSHALL DAVIS, poet and recent Rosenwald Fellow,

writes from Chicago, "I am extremely glad to learn of the new policy the magazine contemplates. Unfortunately, earlier issues were to me somewhat disappointing."

*The response to letters sent out by the editors and to our limited publicity has been most gratifying. New Challenge wishes to thank its correspondents, and hopes there will be even more letters to quote from in the next issue.*



## ASYLUM OF A CENTURY'S SILENCE

*By Norman Macleod*

Saturnine as the stars in elliptical fields of winter, Carey Hargreaves stared at the floor before him. He was always thus—elbows sharp curvatures of pain, pressed upon thigh to brace the line of his jawbone. His mouth was not weak, though the immobile contours of face and forehead framed a countenance of conflict. Static were the lines in direct proportion to the bane beneath eye-brows. The glitter of the facet of his soul. If his eyes were bright, the movement of his mind was constricted. Wherever his thoughts turned, as his feet on cement, always the cell contracted and walls oppressed. But in the soundless liberation of a dream—freedom fomented. Upon the wild avenues of the past, wide beyond memory, his feet faded into the distance of years forgotten and fears but guessed. And then it was that his eyes glazed in the absorption of liberty, unchained like a hound without leash, baying beside the bay woods into the swamps better erased—closed corridors that his brain might heal and all of its meaning be controverted.

Split—that's what it was! As divided as any block of timber cleaved by the woodsman's axe. But it was not clean that hard division—still did the sap of his life run out, the wound of his double separation soaking the soil—that earth which could not nurture him. The sun long dark and gone. There was no kindly courtesy of sadness in his heart. For at first the bitterness and pain were of one likelihood—and later all the sharp agony and its brightness in the world of his eyes was glazed. So that he sat with his elbows boring toward the bones of his thigh—chin thrust forward. Eyes deep with darkness or mocking the sardonic walls.

If his mother could make no mention of a bond long broken, what could be expected from attendant guards? He was forgotten as completely as the death dealt by his hand. A man forever

doubled over—more the resolution of the safe (no combination, and the contents black—deeper than any cognant semblance known to man). And he watched, and sat like statuary, moved more unseemingly than mist—mirage of a body bent to timelessness. Nothing to wait for, nothing to know but day and night with his breath the pendulum between the two—impartial as a poisonous flower exhaling perfume every hour of its life.

Some there were who knew Carey Hargreaves before he was sent to the asylum. In Alabama he had grown up under the sun, proudly as all the other boys of his lineage had done—watching the southern girls shaded by magnolia flowers. Brown against the white faces, so fanciful, unreal. And for long he had not known that the old days were gone. That his house was pregnant with ruin. If he was the pastor of the past, it paid him little. After the days of early drunkenness were drained, the last billiard ball bounced off the green cushions of adolescence—After he had emerged into his consciousness of strength (his feet planted firmly on the red earth, loins strong with future bloom within them, and his sterterous breathing breasted against the dawn) . . . Came the day of objective realization.

What was his mother but an echo of forgotten battles? It seemed as if the aura of the crumbled past powdered her shoulders. She too had the bright eyes, the feverish glitter—with one hand smoothing the folds of her dress. Slim to a skeleton of remembrance. And what she talked of, God himself could not question. Out of Virginia came the Hargreaves, out of the Hargreaves came North Carolina and out of the Carolinas was built the beauty of red and black Alabama. And if it came to the absolute finality—the Hargreaves had made the South—soft from their strength and steeled to let soil alone. The slaves did for them.

But came the day Carey surveyed the past, could not forget it. Saw the present and took it in his hands. Clenched his fists and the world dripped through his fingers. Looked at the southern



skies and saw them black. Dark deep the refuge of bitterness. Time was the past and the past was a long time moulded. He saw that his blood was not strong enough to protect his body, that his flesh would not bear a fallen patrimony. Around his ears the sound of the descent of the years was mockery. The house was gone and his mother dying. There was no bone of his heritage stiff enough to hold its own.

From that time on—Carey Hargreaves made a pact with silence. Unconscious though it was, he entered for the first and last time never to leave it (except on one temporary parole) the trenchant penitentiary of pain. He could not face the world as he saw it. How contrive to make the past conform to the future? How to avoid the present's being a jeer? There was no logical answer to such argumentation. Wherever he felt that the Hargreaves rightfully belonged he found occupied before him. He began to believe the South his natural foe.

Out of all this mental and environmental darkness, there came one miraculous light—an unrecognizable glow at first and then brightness. Where least expected friends are made and love grows the unexpected flower. In his immodest home (his mother dead and buried of malnutrition; lack of glory) there was a girl who cooked what turnips were in the garden. More from tradition than temper, her family had kept the Hargreaves house from extinction. Expert are the ants which eat the foundation. Against time and decay, Sarah fought a lonely battle—as ancestors before her.

For if it had not been for the slaves, no plantation but would have perished. And later, the same dark faces continued, the same hands worked. Plantations and whites or no planters at all—still the rich soil of the South belonged to the Negroes who tilled the soil, took care of the cotton—and sometimes out of the largess of the soul, prevented the white "aristocracy" from seeing themselves in a mirror—See the emptiness and frustration, the helplessness of hands that were soft because dark hands were hard. Anyway, all

the white mirrors in the South had been broken many times. Seven times seven years bad luck, and the Negroes carried the South along.

And slowly as the weeks wept out so many lifetimes, Carey Hargreaves came to see (as a man coming out of delirium) Sarah with her straight brown lines and the clean cut of her forehead. Quiet as a breeze from the Carribbean and quite as warm with the subdued dusk of her body, homogeneous with the blood flow in the earth's pulsation, Sarah was nevertheless a cool compress of white magnolia for any brow tortured with malignance.

Increasingly, Carey watched with surreptitious wonder the slow but certain pattern of her ways. And could not sleep—forgetting the miasmic fungus bequeathed him by his mother. But it was a madness no man about him—no woman of his race! The tolerance of the white man in the South defined one side of the street. No more than they could he openly pass, free and unobserved, on the other. And as surely as any avenue in the village, the corridors of his home were double passage. Across the line was a vengeance as clear as any Negro lynched in moonlight—and the flames blazing.

The tortured limbs were black against the sky. And now with him it was not as with those others. The casual conception was as much a desecration of his thought as the physical fact would be to Sarah. But it was not the brown limbs of a girl moving like a river, it was not her adjusted strength and sensitive equilibrium. It was all of that and it was tragically more, for his mind was still the labyrinthine tangle of terror. There was no outlet, for the present remained peopled with macabre menace: the figures of death's century sentry to the door of life.

Without bayonet to thrust aside overt opposition—In any case, the momentum of inherited blood was a bomb in his body. The shrapnel was residue of steel in his veins. Quietly, he watched

Sarah as the days grew dark. Thoughts before death and his hands beside him. Until week by week he sat in a chair more tightly than any corpse in a coffin. And it was the sound of his silence that set the hounds of the South upon his track. His silence betrayed him. Emaciated emotions withered the body and, like his mother before him, his eyes grew preternaturally bright—but he would not talk. Even Sarah because of it became invested with fright and wore like a cloak the Inquisition.

One evening in lateness of a summer Carey Hargreaves would never see again—the train of sunset a procession on the land—the townspeople came and took him away. Bodily they transported the mad universe of his mind into the incomprehensible cosmos of the asylum. And the house sank softly to the level of the soil, with only a whisper on the wind to remind the transient tenants of our time that death comes more slowly and inexorably than birth—

That the day is not yet for kindness.



## AS A FRIEND

*By Benjamin Appel*

"It's a party for The League to Further Racial Cooperation," Scott said with the gloomy enthusiasm of a man about to practice equality.

It sounded to me like a fine slogan. No matter how you interpreted it, the decisive ring of the twentieth century was all there. "All right," I said. "I've always been for the underdog and no League can escape my moral support."

The party was in a high-class Harlem apartment house. We paid a quarter each at the door and were admitted to two long rooms, and a kitchen where cocktails were being sold at fifteen and twenty cents for The League.

Swell, I thought, looking about at my first colored party.

Damn, I thought, you're still full of the white-man phobia. But then the intellect, that mighty support of man, helped me out. All this was for the new League. All this was a quickening of man's stride to brotherhood and such.

I introduced myself in the kitchen to two colored men who were intellectuals but were now functioning as bartenders. They were dressed in the current Harvard or Oxford vogue. I do not know. I've been out of college too long.

"My name's Nelson," the big-framed one said. He made up some Tom Collins that he sold to a white pansy who was furthering the cause of The League with double twenty cents.

The second bartender had a thin intense face. By God, I thought, a colored Hamlet. And now for no reason at all he said, "Nelson? That's a Swedish name."

"My name's Alden," said the Hamlet. "One of my ancestors came over in the Mayflower."

"So that's how you want to play," I said. We all had a good laugh. "But who gives a damn about grandfathers. We're interested in the present. Specifically, The League to Further Racial Cooperation."

"Yes," Alden said as if it had just occurred to him.

"The purpose of this party," I reminded him. "It's about time, too, for all underdogs to begin cooperation."

Nelson spoke for both of them. "Yes?"

"Sure," I said. "Underdogs against war and fascism. A People's Front the way they have in France or Spain."

The orders for drinks were coming in fast. Nelson and Alden excused themselves. I watched their sophisticated deft movements. They were almost boys of the pent-house. Rah-rah gents dressed in swell clothes and good-time ideas.

I hurried into the living room. Those two dumb light-brains didn't even know there was a colored problem. But just the same here was The League in somebody's mind and I was determined to find it.

It looked like a job.

At the piano a colored man was pounding out jungle stuff. The usual nuts who lean on pianos like so many spirits of bad music were staring foggily at the artist. This room and the communicating bedroom, the French doors wide open, were crowded with the dancing supporters of The League.

He sang: "And I'm gonna eat . . ."

The leaners on the piano moaned in chorus: "Asparagus."

He sang: "And I'm gonna eat . . ."

"Tuna fish."

Plus spinach, pumpkin pie, turnips.

"It seems to me," I said, "this is just a plain party. The idea is to have a good time."

Nobody listened. I wasn't the only one talking to himself. I bought more drinks for I've got nothing against parties. But just the same this wasn't an ordinary jazz-it-up party. It was an idea. I was sitting on the bathtub watching Scott comb his blond hair.

"Do you know the purpose of this party?" I asked. "You dragged me here."

"I'm having fun. I like colored parties."

"You know who's up here? Intellectuals. The cream of Harlem. Teachers. College grads."

"You must be drunk," Scott said very happy.

"No, I'm just crazy. I got an idea somebody must know it's a party for—"

"The League," he howled. "I know that gag. Come on out and forget it. I'm as much for a new set-up as you are but this is just a party."

He began to dance with a mulatto and when he caught my eye he winked. I said to my partner, "Do you know whether anything definite is coming out of this party?"

The dance ended. Only between dances did you realize it was impossible to move or get an answer to questions. When you



danced it made no difference. Yet the doorbell was ringing. The supporters of The League to Further Racial Cooperation were rushing in in battalions. A little white girl with a face so still it had a quality of being hammered out refused to dance with a Negro.

"Why you-all done that them thing," I said with a humorous-to-myself attempt at a southern accent. "Doan you-all know it's all equality hyah? Listen, kid, what's the party about?"

"It's fun. I like fun but I don't like funny guys."

I went to the kitchen and bought another drink.

"No," yelled Scott. "That one's on me."

"And the next's on me. We'll support The League until our skins burst."

"Don't pull that gag."

We leaned against the wall in utter privacy since we were surrounded by strangers. "Those bartenders are proud their grandpappies are Swedes and Mayflowers."

"Don't pull those gags."

I hated to leave him. He was drunk enough to think I was a real funny guy but I wasn't drunk enough to believe him.

The white race was represented by what? I wondered. Women who looked like social workers. Some pansys. Good-time Charleys. Liberals like Scott. And some serious-minded saps of one kind and another among which—The Searcher For The League. The hell with it. It gets you down when you see a good idea get swamped by the escapists, the dilettantes, the whoring and boozing camp-followers.

Many couples had abandoned the ball-room style of dancing, holding each other with both arms. Drunks were roaring in the happy way of their species. The second room was the double of the first and I thought groggily: that if there were a third or fourth or thousandth room they'd be jammed with the same people, none of them giving one damn about a real union of black and white.

"The League will solve many problems," a colored man said.

"Hooray," I shouted. "You know about it?"

"Yes. This will be a start to better relations."

"How?"

"Meetings. Forums—"

"Let me get this straight. Will the League go in for political action? Will you fight for Negro rights?"

"Are you a Red?" he said, shrinking.

"No. I'm just for the underdog. I believe in human rights, and the right not to hide your head in the sand."

But he was edging away with a funny smile that wasn't pathetic so much as it was scared.

I slumped into an empty chair. I was the prize nut. Hoorah America. This was my first Harlem party. And would I invite these people to my home to meet my women-folk, would the colonel do that? I would not. There was that conditioning from childhood on, that eternal cry *nigger* and all that the cry meant. I was prejudiced, it was in my nerves but I had emancipated my mind. I knew with my mind that there was no difference between black and white. There were only underdogs and topdogs. I was with the underdogs.

But how could I feel equality with people who refused to face the facts of their lives? The party continued. I half-closed my eyes. The merry-go-round seemed to be happening far off as if they were all on some island and I was leaving them and their fates forever. The high laughter. The shine of glasses. All had a remote and soon-to-be forgotten quality as if actually they were diminishing in my sight while my mind *knew* these people would not be my allies.

The door bell rang. A young colored man came in. "A party for the League," he said. "Why don't you call it a party for a party? The old Harlem vacuum. Safe in their black Jerusalem. There's no white world. No hungry world. Just the bunch of us. I'd rather go to the Savoy and see the elevator boys dancing with their women. They're honest. They don't talk bunk."

No one even looked at him. "One happy brain-bust. You'll all vote the old parties."

"Why don't you go home," someone said. They all seemed to know him. "Go on home."

"Not a new thought in ten years. Who's heard of lynching? Who's heard of share-croppers? It's all for the best in the best of possible worlds. Go on. Call me a radical. The old red herring. I'm just trying to think like a man and not an intellectual." He Bronx-cheered. "That for the League."

He was saying everything a man should say. I shook hands with him. "I'm glad you came." I didn't know what else to say. All I knew was that I liked him. This was the first time in my life I had ever felt towards a colored man as a friend. We were more than friends. We were anti-fascists.



## JESSIE'S MOTHER

*By Valdemar Hill*

"Give me a cent, Neighbor Netta," begged Jessie of the tall woman passing outside the fence. The little Negro child tiptoed, with hand stretched eagerly over the top of the rails.

"I can hardly spare a cent, my child," said the woman, resting her bundle on the edge of the gutter and fumbling with her purse.

Jessie's mother turned from her wash-pan as she heard her child begging. Her dark face wrinkled with reproach. She pursed her lips.

"Don't mind the child, Neighbor Netta."

"That's all right. I find one. Here, go buy sweet." The woman handed Jessie a cent through the fence rails.

Jessie giggled and jigged up and down, showing her cent proudly.

Jessie's mother allowed her neighbor to get out of hearing. Then wiping her arms in her apron, she called the child into the house.

With hanging head Jessie followed her stern-faced mother into the one-room house which they called home. Her mother stood in the doorway, arms akimbo. She motioned Jessie to a packing box to sit down.

"Jessie, how much time I must tell you not to beg for cent? Child, 'tis pride you ain't have? Gimme that cent!"

She jerked the coin from the clutching fingers and threw it violently into the street. It rolled tinkling into the gutter.

"I is poor and short-handed, but I don't believe you should go round begging and picking up. The next time I hear of you picking up and begging, you going see what I going do with you. Now promise me you ain't going to do it again."

"I ain't going to do it again, mammie," promised Jessie. But she pouted and sucked her teeth when her mother went back to the wash-pan in the blazing sun.

"I want my cent," she grumbled.

"Wash them plate for me," called her mother from the yard. "I can't leave off these clothes now."

Jessie appeared in the doorway, her ragdoll under her arm. "I ain't washing them greasy things, mammie. I going to play with Alice and Letty in the next yard." She began to skip across the yard.

"Come back here!" commanded her mother. "You have too much of your own way for your eight years. Put down that doll and go wash them plate and cups. I just talk to you 'bout one thing, and now you go off on another."

Jessie flung down the doll, and stamped her feet. "I can't get to do nothing. You throw 'way my cent, now you won't let me go play."

"You hear what I say!" shouted her mother. "Now, go inside at once! Since your father died you well getting beyond yourself."

Jessie stomped into the house. The pots and pans clanged with her vexation.

"I don't know what to do with that child," her mother sighed aloud. Her body moved rhythmically up and down with the chug chug chug of her scrubbing. The sun blazed down on her back.

"All she want is to eat, play, and slinger in the street."

"Eh, eh, Neighbor Mena, you washing again?"

Jessie's mother looked up across the fence at a big fat woman balancing a pail of water on her head.

"You bringing water, Cassie? The reservoir open?"

"No, my child," replied Cassie, leaning against the fence without taking the pail of water off her head. "This is two-cent water from the Smiths. That old hag, Mistress Smith, going dead bad if she don't stop selling water so small."

"Our cistern almost dry, too. And I have this pile of man clothes here to wash. Perhaps the reservoir might open in the morning. Well, what happening in town?"

"Oh, nothing new, except the *Olympia* come in loaded with tourists a while ago. The street full with them now. What a thing they have down there! They spending money like water. Them Cha-cha woman selling straw coats and hats like hot bread. All 'bout you could see the tourists buying postcards, bananas, beer, everything. My child, 'tis a regular spree they have in town."

"If I hadn't these clothes to do I would have gone down with some mangoes. But these clothes is a sure piece of bread."

"Yes, my child," continued Cassie. "And 'tis so the children begging for cent—and 'tis so the tourists throwing it up by the handful. They have it like a picnic . . . No, Neighbor Mena, I going up. I leave Jimmy fuming for some water. So long."

"S'long, Cassie."

Jessie's mother returned to her scrubbing. Her hands worked methodically as the perspiration streamed down her face. She washed and ironed for the Petersens, who owned a big grocery on



the main street. Jobs were scarce in St. Thomas, and she was glad to get this one.

"Lord, the sun too hot today," she commented, fanning herself with her broad straw hat.

Jessie came out with a pail of soapy water and threw it into the gutter.

"Mammie, I finish. I could go play now?"

"What a nice child! You see it didn't take you long. Come for a kiss, my darling." She caught her little daughter in her soapy arms and gave her a loud smack on the cheek. "You must listen to your mother, darling, and learn to behave yourself. Run along now. I hear tourist in town—don't go in the street!"

Jessie's mother watched the red and white calico frock disappear. Her only child. It was for her that she toiled here in the sun. It was for her welfare that she, Mena, went hungry many a day. She didn't want anybody to have anything to throw in her daughter's face. She wanted her daughter to grow up nice and honest and upright. She had to grow up like the white people children. Her father, a light-colored mulatto, had died two years ago. Jessie always obeyed him. He was stern and demanded obedience. After his death Jessie grew difficult to handle.

Jessie's mother shook off this reflection and returned to her washpan with a cheerful smile. A cat scampered across the yard with a dead mouse. A fish seller passed up the street bawling, "Fresh fish!" in a loud voice. The odor of excellent beef soup drifted by. Across the street Mama Chloe was tasting her pot with a critical air. The sun blazed down. Even the soapy water was warm.

A few minutes later George McClinton, the garbage cart man,

came into the yard with a pair of dirty dungaree pants crumpled under his arm.

"'Tis good you washing, Neighbor Mena," he greeted her. "I want you wash this pants for me."

She was accustomed to these odd jobs.

"How come you ain't working today, Georgie?" She took the pants and a quarter.

"The town too full of them blasted tourist," said Georgie vehemently. "They won't let a man do his work in peace. Every minute someone throwing away banana skin, mango skin, or a beer bottle. So the boss tell me to hold up till in the morning."

"You get a holiday then?"

"It ain't a piece of a holiday," contradicted Georgie sourly. "Because I ain't going to get paid for it. Them set of nuisance down there throwing money up in the air, and I, a poor man, well want them dime and quarters."

"They having a good time, Georgie. And tomorrow," her black eyes twinkled, "you sure to find some money when you go round cleaning up."

"That's a idea, Neighbor Mena!" exclaimed Georgie. "You sure right! So long, Neighbor Mena."

"S'long, Georgie, you'll get the pants in the morning."

"That's all right." He went away chuckling.

A border of white and colored clothes waved on the clothesline. Jessie's mother surveyed them with pride, and stretched her cramped fingers. How her back ached! Tomorrow she would starch. Friday she would iron. Another little odd job or two would

keep her going in food until pay day, Saturday. A car sputtered up the street full of tourists singing, "How Dry I Am." Chuckling to herself, Jessie's mother went towards the house for a drink of water.

She stopped in the doorway. Jessie was there. She sat at the rough board table eating chocolates. On the table were apples, cheese, biscuits, and more candy. As her mother appeared, Jessie flung her frock over the pile. She hung her head guiltily.

"Where you get these from, Jessie?" demanded her mother.

"Down there," the child whispered, motioning to the street with her head.

"Down there where?"

"I was hungry—and—and—they was throwing away money."

"Jessie!"

Jessie shrank from the blazing anger of her mother.

"Don't lick me, mammie! I won't do it again!"

"But, Jessie, what I tell you this morning?"

"I was hungry, mammie, and a dime roll by my foot."

Her mother took up a stout pine knot used for kindling fire.

"I going learn you to pick up and beg." She began to pound her fingers. "Them fingers—" Crack!—"tis them—don't learn to pick up—" Crack! Crack!—"don't learn nigger ways."

Jessie shrieked with pain as her knuckles swelled and drops of blood appeared.

"Shoo! Shoo!" hissed her mother. "Don't make a noise. You mean after I starve myself to give you all you want you going to

pick up from them half-scaled tourist. Damn them! You just as good as any of them. I going broke these fingers for you!"

The child screamed. The street grew a curious crowd. Jessie's mother continued to beat her.

A policeman rushed into the room.

"You're under arrest—you!" He grabbed the half-mad woman by the hair.

She turned on him furiously.

"Arrest me in my own house for beating my own child—for preventing her from picking up them tourist money!"

Jessie crawled into a corner, sucking her bleeding knuckles, and sniffing.

"Look how you have you own child," sternly admonished the policeman. "Woman, you must be crazy."

He dragged her raving from her home, holding her tightly. The laughing and jeering crowd followed. A few who were mothers shook their heads sympathetically.

That night Jessie's mother kept vigil behind iron bars. A neighbor took Jessie in for the night. Next morning the mother faced a stern-looking white judge in a crowded court room. Everyone wanted to see "the woman who had half-killed her child".

The judge, who had not long ago eaten a very good breakfast, now quoted the Bible as he sentenced the mother. She listened in silence. But her lips quivered as he sentenced her to sixty days imprisonment.

"Oh, Mister Judge," she cried with overwhelming emotion. "You mean you going to lock me up for caring for my own child?"



Judge, you wouldn't want your daughter in the street picking up money, would you? You tries to bring up your daughter like a lady, don't you? Well, I is a mother, and all I do is—is—" She choked with sobs—"is for my only child." She dropped beseechingly at the judge's feet. "Leave me go for her sake, please!"

Through a murmuring crowd a tall policeman dragged her towards the cell—her home for the next two months. From every direction eyes turned upon the mother who had tried to bring up her child like a lady. No one said a word to comfort the mother who had done everything for the welfare of her child—her only comfort.

Jessie with her knuckles bandaged saw her mother go down the dark, narrow steps. She saw a grim warden push her into a dark niche in the thick, red walls. She heard an iron grating slam—heard a heavy lock snap, and saw her mother's dark face wet with tears pressed against the iron bars.

"All this for you," came a sobbing whisper up the narrow passageway to the child standing above. "Come kiss me, Jessie, come."

Jessie made to go, but the warden led her out of the court yard.

"I want my mother!" screamed Jessie. "I want my mother!"

## WHEN LADIES LEGISLATE

*By George B. Linn*

The fifth regular semi-monthly meeting of the American Society for the Preservation of Americanism met as usual in the club room of the Carnegie Library and soon Mrs. Herbert Wendover, president of the organization, had appointed a chairman of the committee-of-the-whole. They always went into the committee-of-the-whole and Rockville's leading matrons, who made up the organization, discussed a subject of interest to such worthy citizens. Then they returned to the regular assembly and drew up a resolution. However, the committee-of-the-whole served another purpose for the benefit of Mrs. Wendover. For, while she was a very competent chairman, she was also an orator. She had an opportunity to speak while they were in the committee-of-the-whole and someone else was presiding. Moreover, had the rules of parliamentary procedure permitted her to do more speaking while presiding, the platform upon which the president stood would have hindered the style of the oratorical Mrs. Wendover. Six feet tall and as light on her feet as a ton of coal, she paraded over the entire floor while expounding the principles of the immortal fathers of the Constitution. Mrs. Wendover had never read the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence but she knew all about them for she followed the editorials in the Rockville Herald and read the features in the Sunday editions of the metropolitan papers.

At the four previous meetings they had discussed "Fundamental American Principles," "Our Constitution," "Americanism or Bolshevism?," and "Our American Institutions." This time they were discussing "The Enemy Within America."

"We are gathered here today as free independent citizens," Mrs. Wendover was soon telling the committee. "We fear no lurking hirelings of dictators, as we gather here to discuss matters of

interest to patriotic people. Why? Because we are protected by our Constitution; our Constitution for which our forefathers bled; our Constitution which protects our life, liberty, and property! That is the American system!

"Let us now look at some of the other systems. In Russia the government by the people was overthrown by grotesque agitators, working underground toward the destruction of the principles of freedom and equality. How did these fiends go about it? Their first basic step was to seize private property! Then they went to the meeting of the parliamentary body which was at work planning a Russian democratic government and one of their leaders said to the chairman, 'Comrade, you have said enough. Go home!' That was the death blow to freedom and equality in Russia and the birth of tyranny, despotism, and dictatorship.

"Now, perhaps some of you are wondering what the respectable people were doing all this time (for surely there must have been some respectable Russians). Oh, they were going about as though nothing were the matter. They laughed at the radical activity in Russia. And, well, you see what happened.

"Let us look again at our own nation. Do you know that today the right of private property is being questioned as never before? Organized government is being challenged by mob-rule and violence. At this moment sit-down strikers are holding private property. A lawless body defying law and order! Why their very organization is a lawless revolutionary body. And they defend themselves by arguing that the Wagner Act gives them the right to organize. However, they forget that it has been pointed out by perfectly competent authorities that the Wagner Act is un-Constitutional!

"What are we going to do about it? Are we to sit back and laugh it off as the better people in Russia did? Are we going to fiddle while Rome burns? What are we going to do about it?"

"Madam chairman," said Mrs. Ray Ellis, rising, "I believe that what Mrs. Wendover has said should be taken to heart by all patriotic people. If this group should pass a resolution denouncing sit-down strikes as a threat to American institutions it would be the greatest thing we have ever accomplished. And I don't know that it ought to be limited to sit-down strikes, either. We've never been bothered out here with sit-down strikes yet, but we've had other strikes. Last spring they had the mines closed down. During the summer they closed both theatres. They weren't occupied by sit-down strikers but they might as well have been as far as the public was concerned. They weren't being operated. Now that doesn't look right to me. These agitators should be kept in their places."

Mrs. Ellis, a slender quiet-appearing woman, never talked very long. She was really much more interested in the Bridge Club. But it was fashionable to belong to the only patriotic society in Rockville. She also knew that it wouldn't do to go and appear bored (although frequently she was). Consequently, she felt that it was better to say something early in the meeting and be done with it.

Up to this point Mrs. John Barker had been waiting impatiently to get the floor. The short, stout Mrs. Barker, whose dress made obvious her attempts to appear thin, was no match for Mrs. Wendover as an orator, although she frequently tried. She belonged to a Ladies' Aid, the Literary Club, the Nature Study Club, and was president of the Bridge Club (although her bridge was abominable). She seldom found time for reading the newspapers as did Mrs. Wendover but from ordinary daily conversation she knew as much as the members of the Rockville Commercial Club about strikes, riots, and federal relief, the latter of which was "just a form of communism or fascism, or something of that nature." Her latest accomplishment had been to get her husband elected to the Legislature and she rejoiced that the entire Rockville population must know of it. For the sake of her record she knew it would be a good idea to go Mrs. Ellis one better.



"I admire Mrs. Ellis' spirit," she said, "but to denounce is not enough. We must have action. Strikes have been brought to an end in the past. Vigilante committees have been used in more than one instance. They not only end strikes and preserve order but they have the advantage of letting the foreigners and trouble-makers know that our institutions will be preserved. We are a peace-loving people and we don't intend to submit to violence or mob rule and the eventual destruction of our institutions."

"Now, I think we're getting somewhere," said Mrs. Wendover, "but we must go even further. Vigilante committees alone are not enough. Perhaps when they are needed mostly our enemies will be too strong for the vigilantes. I have in mind one good thing I believe we should do to begin right here at home. Right now, there is pending in the Legislature a bill to legalize the kind of practices we have been discussing—to *legalize* them, if you please! Now I think it is up to us, as citizens, to memorialize our Legislature to defeat that distinctly un-American bit of proposed legislation."

Mrs. A. G. Laughlin now took the floor. She was a small blond woman who lent doubt to the dogma that red-headed people are the most hot-tempered. Her husband was proprietor of the Laughlin Packing Company and only the night before she had heard him remark that "if that collective bargaining bill went through it would just about wreck business in the state."

"I agree with Mrs. Wendover," she said. "All this union business is just a graft anyway. One might as well not own property if he can't run his business the way he wants to. It's getting to be so—this is a fact now—that they tell you whom to hire and whom to fire. If you try to cut down expenses or discharge one employee, they all quit. Now that doesn't look right to me."

"That's what I say," said Mrs. Wendover, rising, "I think we should see to it that our Legislature doesn't legalize this graft."

At last the fifth regular semi-monthly meeting of the A. S. P. A. ended, after the ladies had drawn up a resolution asking the Legislature to "defeat the radical, un-American, so-called 'collective bargaining' bill, which could only endanger our institutions."

Then after they had sipped their tea, while Mrs. Wendover told the lady at her right that she had heard from well-informed sources that Mrs. Laughlin actually gossiped, but not to breathe a word of it to anybody because she did like Mrs. Laughlin and wouldn't have anything come between them for the world, the ladies went home, leaving the finishing touches up to the Legislature.

The day before the Legislature was to convene Mrs. John Barker had reminded her husband that he must vote against the collective bargaining bill, but he hadn't given her a definite answer. It would be fine, she had thought if her husband should be instrumental enough in killing this un-American legislation to make the A. S. P. A. sit up and take notice. Other than that she had no interest in the matter. She seldom thought of it after he left. If he didn't vigorously oppose it, perhaps they wouldn't even know about it in Rockville. And if he did vigorously oppose it she would make sure that they did know about it.

However, a few days before the vote was to be taken on the bill in the house of Representatives, Mrs. Barker was informed by Mrs. Wendover that they were "going in a body" to the Capitol, fifty miles south, and protest against the bill. Also they would have an opportunity to remain there and watch the process by which they were saving America. Consequently, the day on which the vote was taken found the majority of the ladies in the gallery above the House chamber.

Mrs. Barker wanted to tear her hair as she thought of the fact that John just might vote for the bill. In fact, she did remember something about his campaign pamphlets (which she had helped circulate) saying something about his being a "liberal" and a "pro-

gressive", and a "friend of organized labor". She should never have let it go this way! She should have demanded a definite answer at the first. Why the other members of the A. S. P. A. would disown her if John voted "aye"

"Well, I guess we're going to have plenty of moral support, as one might say," said Mrs. Wendover to Mrs. Barker. "No doubt you have your hubby well instructed," she added with a smile.

"Oh yes, I haven't been loafing," answered Mrs. Barker. ("Damn him if he doesn't vote against that bill!") she thought to herself.

At that moment a young brunette woman entered the gallery and exchanged greetings with Mrs. Barker and Mrs. Wendover.

"You remember her, don't you?" whispered Mrs. Wendover to Mrs. Barker.

"I don't believe I do."

"Why, you remember Hattie Young who used to teach in the high school at Rockville, don't you? She left about a month ago and married Albert Houston. He's a representative from Jefferson County. She came to one of our meetings. I believe it was the second we held. You know, I always thought it was very peculiar that she didn't come to A. S. P. A. again. I don't know whether it was snobbishness or that she just wasn't interested in the cause. Terrible, I think. Really! I've always said that, of all people, school-teachers should be patriotic."

She then proceeded to tell Mrs. Barker not to breathe a word of it because she did like Mrs. Houston and wouldn't have anything come between them for the world.

But Mrs. Barker wasn't listening to Mrs. Wendover. She was listening to the debate concerning the bill and wondering how John would vote.

A man, who could nearly match Mrs. Wendover as an orator, was saying:

"Anyone who knows anything about business knows that it can't be carried on efficiently with a lot of agitators filling employees with a lot of ballyhoo and making them think they are getting a raw deal. We don't have forced labor in this free country of ours. If an employee doesn't like his work or what he's getting, he can quit. And if he wants to quit, he ought to go on about his business and not try to get everyone else to quit. Why today they are actually holding property to gain their ends. If they have the right to do that they have the right to hold other people's homes . . . !"

Soon another representative was saying:

"Will the gentleman *please* put his brains to work and remember that the bill does not provide that sit-down strikes are to be legal? All the bill provides is that labor be granted the right to organize and bargain collectively. It is absurd to argue that it is fair to a working man to compel him to bargain individually when his job is at stake . . ."

It would be just her luck, Mrs. Barker thought, for John to begin defending that bill! At last, however, she breathed a sigh of relief. They were recessing for fifteen minutes! Well, she had made John come to time in less than fifteen minutes more than once! Without saying a word to anyone she abruptly arose and hastened downstairs.

"I suppose your husband is backing us today," said Mrs. Wendover to Mrs. Houston.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Houston pleasantly.

"He's voting against this bill, of course?"

"If he does I'll divorce him," said Mrs. Houston bluntly.



"That cat!" whispered Mrs. Wendover to Mrs. Laughlin a little later, "I always said she was about as pro-American as Stalin."

She didn't even instruct Mrs. Laughlin not to breathe a word of it.

"It seems, from what I've heard, that it's going to be a hard fight," said Mrs. Laughlin. "Of course, if it does pass the House, there's a chance that it may be killed in the Senate."

"Yes, that's true," said Mrs. Wendover, "but dear me! Such atrocious legislation shouldn't even get by one house of our Legislature!"

"Do you know," said Mrs. Laughlin, "I've learned of a block that's fighting for that bill. It seems that the leader is that Representative Houston, from Jefferson County."

"Huh! I guess that hussy does have plenty of influence over him, after all," interrupted Mrs. Wendover.

"*And*, I've also learned on good authority," Mrs. Laughlin went on, "that John Barker is a member of that block! Oh, I know it's true. I was just talking to James Tremaine, you know, the attorney for the Northwestern Furniture Company. I said, 'Oh, I'm sure we can depend on Mr. Barker fighting that bill.' And he just shook his head and said, 'No, Barker's lined up with that Houston bunch.'"

"So that's why Mrs. Barker left so suddenly," whispered Mrs. Wendover. "Afraid to stay and face the music!"

"Come to think of it," said Mrs. Laughlin, "didn't John Barker make a big appeal to these unions during the campaign? So that's the way it is!"

"Huh! I guess he thinks he should represent a lot of aliens instead of the citizens of his country," said Mrs. Wendover.

In the meantime a very hostile Mrs. Barker was talking to her husband in a room downstairs.

"John, answer me," she said for the sixth time. "Are you going to vote against that bill, or not?"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake," he said at last, "I'll go up in the gallery. You can go in the chamber and do the votin'."

"John, quit trying to be funny!" she snapped. "All right, then! I will go in the chamber *and* I'll sit right there on your desk until you *oppose* that bill."

"Oh, I get it," he said. "You're so darned opposed to sit-down strikes and such things that you're goin' on a sit-down strike to get what you want. I can't vote against that bill. I've already promised to vote for it."

"Well, you can change your mind," she said. "You have a right to vote the way you *want* to, don't you? What can they do about it?"

Mrs. Barker's reputation with the A. S. P. A. was at stake and she wasn't going to give in. They would see how John voted and they all would expect him to vote against the bill. She didn't attempt to convince him as to which would win him the most political support but she made it clear as to how he must vote if he expected any peace at home.

"All right, I'll vote for it," he said at last. "Now please go back to the gallery and quit makin' fools out of us."

"I'll go back," she said, "but remember, vote 'no' or I'll show you that there are other ways of making fools of us."

Mrs. Barker soon found herself back in the gallery where Mrs. Wendover had been telling Mrs. Laughlin that Mrs. Barker had

a world of nerve—actually leaving the impression that her husband was fighting the bill—but they weren't to breathe a word of it because she did like Mrs. Barker and wouldn't have anything come between them for the world.

Almost immediately after the House convened, discussion was closed on the bill and the vote was taken. The collective bargaining bill was killed in the House by one vote.

Having saved America the ladies began to leave the gallery. Mrs. Houston was among the persons who remained.

"The cat!" said Mrs. Wendover. "It didn't do her much good even if she did wrap Mr. Houston around her little finger. I'll bet anything that's the only reason in the world he voted for that bill. You know, if there's anything I detest, it's a man who can't stand by his guns."

"You know," said Mrs. Laughlin, after making sure that Mrs. Barker was not within hearing distance, "you can't fool me! John Barker *had* intended to vote for that bill. One might have guessed it from the line he put up during the campaign. I'll tell you. It was Mrs. Barker who persuaded her husband. We owe a lot to that woman. It's just as I've always said, you can't beat conviction!"

"That's right," said Mrs. Wendover. "Right makes might. That's how she managed to change his mind. Right always wins!"

## THE CANNY CANNIBAL OR, DON'T FEED THE HAND THAT'S BITING YOU

*By Clarence Hill*

One afternoon the Fourth Scratcher of the Royal Back remained silent for a long time. So the King said something to make the talkative fellow talk. The King said: "Why don't you say something?"

But Back Scratcher remained silent, making designs upon the King's back. The King groaned contentedly, for, though he could not see the designs they felt good to him.

At this point the Royal Backscratcher decided to say something: "Why I don't say something, your Royal Toothsomeness, is because I have an idea."

"That's right, Savor," said the King. "Give heart and hands and head away but hang on to your idea."

"That's a good idea, your highness," the Scratcher commended ruminatively, "and my idea of a good idea is that it wouldn't be a bad idea if we all took up looking like tigers."

The King raised a shoulder to shift the action a little toward the middle. "Tigers?" said he.

"For the simple reason," continued Savor the Scratcher, "that it would please the Gods and consequently have them love us more, since just as men have more love for their dogs than for other men, so the Gods love tigers better than they love us, owing to the fact that we are like Gods on account of their resemblance to us, and the tiger being the dog of the Gods, I say, therefore let men become tigers!"



He concluded these remarks with emphasis in the region of the Royal Lumbar Vertebrae, which made the King thoughtful.

"Besides, Your Serene Highmeat,"—the skilled fingers now executed delicate cross-hatchings just above the Royal Sacrum—, "as I say, *besides*, who but you has the power to change men into tigers with a single word!" A clean sweep of line up to the Royal Back-of-the-Neck. The King wriggled and brooded, and the Back Scratcher of the Royal Back stopped a moment to hone his nails.

The King took a long drink from the deep skull of a vanquished foe.

"That's a good idea," he said with a thoughtful belch, "and as a good idea is something to think about, let's take immediate action."

So it was not two moonrises more before all the people had striped themselves to look like tigers. So much like tigers, indeed, that only tigers could distinguish them from tigers. But this was not why in the long run (and there was much long running, as you can imagine) the experiment failed. For, like many experiments that fail, this one failed because of its success. To be brutally frank and not mince matters, these people, what with all their yellow stripes and fine slinking, often by mistake killed a real tiger.

Now this was intolerable. When the King discovered this he leapt from the dinner table disgusted and ran to the window but not to shout.

"It stands to reason," he said as soon as his stomach was settled, "that the only kind of meat one should eat is the kind of which one is made. Like unto like."

"But aren't we all tigers?" pleaded the R.B.S. and author of the reform.

However, the Scratcher soon ate his own words and the King ate the Scratcher.

It was, then, the Royal Cook who suggested the next major reform. Briefly and simply it was this: it would be far better, he suggested, for people to look like rocks, because nobody would bother to pick up a real rock, which was too heavy to make any mistakes about, "*and*", he declared, "O King, since rocks can't be people let people be rocks!"

"Why?" asked the King.

"Because you don't need to give rocks any attention, yet they're there when you want one."

The King caught the Cook's wink. "You said a mouthful," he said, "let's get some action."

So they did. They went into action, every one acting like a rock, which simply consisted of inaction. Nobody objected to being a good old rock because in the first place all a rock has to do is to stay in the first place, and in the second place what could be the object of a subject trying to object anyhow?

The King found himself surrounded by contented rocks who seemed to be very fond of having him gaze upon them fondly.

"And the harder they try to look like rocks," whispered the Cook, "the more tender they become!"

But they also became fewer.

So one of the smaller ones broke the stony silence. "O King, I've an idea!"

The King at once asked for it, since when you turn up a stone there's no telling what you're likely to find.

"I propose a change in diet," said the small rock.

"Diet?" roared the King. "I'd like nothing better, but we haven't seen any new foreigners around here for a long time."

"Not a one, O King," the youth agreed. "But just as the strangers who come here remain only to become fewer and fewer, until there are no more even to be few, so are we becoming fewer. And while the old theory still holds true that the fewer the eaters the greater the portion to each, yet unless we soon change our present diet for some other, there will be left, aye, a very large portion to eat—but no eater!"

"My good young one," said the King arising to his full height, "do you know what you are asking? You are asking the Impossible! Why! Change our homeophagus habits!" he thundered. "It can't be done!"

"But, Sire, why not?"

"Why not? I'll tell you why not. For the simple reason that **YOU CAN'T CHANGE HUMAN NATURE!**"

The precocious youth sank back to stew in his own juices: it was an unanswerable argument—human nature could not be changed.

## SNAPSHOTS OF THE COTTON SOUTH

*By Frank Marshall Davis*

*Listen, you drawing men  
I want a picture of a starving black  
I want a picture of a starving white  
Show them bitterly fighting down on the dark soil  
Let their faces be lit by hate  
Above there will stand  
The rich plantation owner, holder of the land  
A whip in his red fist  
Show his pockets bulging with dollars spilled  
From the ragged trousers of the fighting men  
And I shall call it  
"Portrait of the Cotton South"*

\* \* \*

*Co'n pone, collard greens, side meat  
Sluggish sorghum and fat yams  
Don't care who eats them.  
The popping bolls of cotton  
Whiter than the snobbish face  
Of the plantation owner's wife  
Never shrink in horror  
At the touch of black croppers' hands.  
And when the weevils march  
They send no advance guard  
Spying at doors, windows  
Reporting back  
"This is a privileged place  
We shall pass it by  
We want only nigger cotton."  
Death  
Speeding in a streamlined racing car  
Or hobbling on ancient crutches*

*Sniffs at the color line;  
Starvation, privation, disease, disaster  
Likewise embarrass Social Tradition  
By indiscriminately picking victims  
Instead of arranging  
Black folk later—  
But otherwise  
Life officially flows  
In separate channels.*

\* \* \*

*Chisel your own statue of God.  
Have him blonde as a Viking king  
A celestial czar of race separation  
Roping off a jim crow section  
On the low lying outskirts of heaven  
Hard by the platinum railroad tracks  
Where there will dwell for eternity  
Good darkies inferiority-conscious  
Of their brothers and sisters  
In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South  
Or  
Have him a dealer of vengeance  
Punishing in hell's hot fires  
Lynchers, quick trigger sheriffs,  
Coniving land owners, slave driving overseers  
While today's black Christians  
Look down at their endless torture  
Then travel the golden streets of paradise  
To the biggest mansions  
In the best districts  
And there feast themselves  
On milk and honey  
As say the preachers  
In the little colored churches.*



*Of course  
There is no intermingling socially  
Between the races  
Such is absolutely unthinkable  
Oh my yes  
Still  
At regular intervals  
The wife of Mobtown's mayor  
Sees an Atlanta specialist  
For syphilis contracted from her husband  
Who got it from their young mulatto cook  
Who was infected by the chief of police  
Who received it from his washerwoman  
Who was made diseased by the shiftless son  
Of the section's richest planter  
One night before  
He led the pack that hanged  
The black bastard who broke into  
A farm woman's bedroom—  
But  
As was mentioned before  
There is no intermingling socially. . . .*

\* \* \*

*Neither Socialist nor Communist lingers here.  
The Southern Tenant Farmers Union  
Is officially a Grave Menace  
Here we have Democracy at its best  
Amid "native American"  
"Bedrock of the nation"  
Untouched by "The Foreign Element"  
They have "Rugged Individualism"  
"Any man may be President"  
"Equality of Opportunity"  
Which, translated, means  
The rich men grow richer*

*Big planters get bigger  
Controlling the land and the towns  
Ruling their puppet officials  
Feeding white croppers and tenant farmers  
Banquets of race hate for the soul  
Sparse crumbs for their thin bodies  
Realizing  
The feast of animosity  
Will dull their minds  
To their own plight*

*So the starving po' whites  
Contemptuous of neighboring blacks  
Filled with their pale superiority  
Live in rotting cabins  
Dirt floored and dirty  
Happy hunting ground of hookworm and vermin  
Overrun with scrawny children  
Poverty sleeping on the front stoop  
Enslaved on islands of rundown clay  
And to the planter-owned commissaries;  
Dying, then dumped into the grinning graves  
Their worm-picked bones resting silently  
In a white burial ground  
Separated even in death  
As were their fathers before them*

*No matter what the cost in taxes  
Sacrificed by penniless croppers  
Unmissed by money-grabbing land owners  
There must be separate accommodations  
And public institutions  
For each race.  
Impoverished white schools  
Loosing tidewaters  
Of anti-Negro propaganda  
While the fallen-in buildings*

*For black children  
Have courses in Manual Arts,  
Writing, and a little figuring  
In between cotton picking and sowing  
And of course  
Care must be taken  
By public officials  
Not to make jails too strong  
And thus inconvenience  
The hungry lynchers.  
Now  
There are some who say  
Voteless blacks never get  
A proportionate return of taxes paid  
But since so many  
Land in the hoosegow  
On copyrighted charges  
And the county pays their keep  
In stockade, on chain gang,  
They really use their share  
Of public funds—  
The arithmetic and logic  
Are indisputable.*

\* \* \*

*At sunrise  
Into the broad fields they go—  
Cropper, tenant, day laborer  
Black and white—  
Leaving behind  
Shacks of logs and rough planks.  
Arching their crooked backs  
Slowly, like long mistreated cats,  
They throttle the living cotton,  
Hustle it, dead and grayish white,  
Into the gaping sacks*

*Portable tombs  
For the soft body  
Of the South's Greatest Industry—  
While, nearby  
Overseers stand  
Throttling the living souls  
Of the broken workers  
Choking their spirit  
Until  
Worn out and useless  
They are crammed into  
The waiting earth—  
Another industry  
Of the Cotton South*

\* \* \*

*Well, you remakers of America  
You apostles of Social Change  
Here is pregnant soil  
Here are grass roots of a nation.  
But the crop they grow is Hate and Poverty.  
By themselves they will make no change  
Black men lack the guts  
Po' whites have not the brains  
And the big land owners want Things As They Are.  
You disciples of Progress  
Of the Advancing Onward  
Communist, Socialist, Democrat, Republican  
See today's picture—  
It is not beautiful to look upon.  
Meanwhile paint pots drip over  
There is fresh canvas for the asking.  
Will you say,  
"But that is not my affair"  
Or will you mold this section  
So its portrait will fit*

*In the sunlit hall  
Of Ideal America?*

**OLD LEM**  
*By Sterling A. Brown*

*I talked to old Lem  
And old Lem said:  
    "They weigh the cotton  
    They store the corn  
        We only good enough  
        To work the rows;  
    They run the commissary  
    They keep the books  
        We gotta be grateful  
        For being cheated;  
    Whippersnapper clerks  
    Call us out of our name  
        We got to say mister  
        To spindling boys  
    They make our figgers  
    Turn somersets  
        We buck in the middle  
Say, 'Thankyuh, sah.'  
    They don't come by ones  
    They don't come by twos  
    But they come by tens.  
    "They got the judges  
    They got the lawyers  
    They got the jury-rolls  
    They got the law  
        They don't come by ones  
    They got the sheriffs  
    They got the deputies  
        They don't come by twos*



*They got the shotguns*

*They got the rope*

*We git the justice*

*In the end*

And they come by tens

*"Their fists stay closed*

*Their eyes look straight*

*Our hands stay open*

*Our eyes must fall*

They don't come by ones

*They got the manhood*

*They got the courage*

They don't come by twos

*We got to slink around,*

*Hangtailed hounds.*

*They burn us when we dogs*

*They burn us when we men*

They come by tens . . .

*"I had a buddy*

*Six foot of man*

*Muscled up perfect*

*Game to the heart*

They don't come by ones

*Outworked and outfought*

*Any man or two men*

They don't come by twos

*He spoke out of turn*

*At the commissary*

*They gave him a day*

*To git out the county.*

*He didn't take it.*

*He said 'Come and get me.'*

*They came and got him.*

And they came by tens.

*He stayed in the county—*

*He lays there dead.*

They don't come by ones  
They don't come by twos  
But they come by tens."

## FROM THOSE SHORES WE HAVE COME

*By Owen Dodson*

*From those shores we have come  
Where anguish spilled over the sand;  
Where the sea was a hum  
Of cries when the life hand took leave of the death hand.  
Now our prophets forget:  
The earth has been fertile with them.  
We are left with our dream of the wet  
Sea-wrath and the sand flower's withering stem.*

## WAR

### TO THE ETHIOPIANS

*By Charles Henri Ford*

*Being black, you merged with the night,  
our natures absorb our desires;  
the sickly fires  
you kindled from the gullets of Italy  
burned out quickly.  
I am not white  
enough to be invisible  
in the sun, my imperfections  
are recognizable;  
the journey is slower  
than massacre;  
but there will be conscriptions  
and marauders no more apropos  
than those in Ethiopia,*

*Bombs hurled at 15,000 poets  
Killing 2,000*

## **SOUTH CHICAGO, MAY 30, 1937**

*By Robert Davis*

*And where was God Memorial Day?  
Perhaps he walked in greener pastures;  
Surely not here where the prairie flowed red  
With workers' blood.  
Christ too—could He not walk on a sea of blood?  
Or was the gas too much for Him?*

## **PEOPLE OF UNREST AND HUNGER**

*By Margaret Walker*

*Stare from your pillow into the sun.  
See the disk of light in shadows.  
Through fingers of morning Day is growing tall.  
People of unrest and hunger  
Stare from your pillow into the sun.  
Cry with a loud voice after the sun.  
Take his yellow arms and wrap them round your life.  
Be glad to be washed in the sun.  
Be glad to see.*

## **SOUTHERN SONG**

*I want my body bathed again by southern suns; my soul reclaimed  
again from southern soil. I want to rest again in southern  
fields; in grass and hay and clover bloom; to lay my hand again  
upon the clay baked by a southern sun; to touch the rain soaked  
earth and smell the smell of soil.  
I want my rest unbroken in the fields of southern earth; freedom to*

*watch the corn wave silver in the sun and mark the splashing  
of a brook—a pond with ducks and frogs, and count the  
clouds.*

*I want no mobs to wrench me from my southern rest; no forms to  
take me in the night and burn my shack and make for me a  
nightmare full of oil and flame.*

*I want my careless song to strike no minor key; no fiend to stand  
between my body's southern song, the fusion of the South, my  
body's song, and me.*

## MESS OF POTTAGE

*They have stolen all that was ours. They have dried the milk in my  
breasts and taken my stunted children away.*

*Ask nothing now you demi-reps of gold and war and hate. My sons  
are no stalwarts to bring you glory any more. My maidens are  
no vestal innocents to serve your pleasure any longer.*

*The skin across their backs shows all the bones.*

## HOUNDS

*There is fire three centuries old in our brains.*

*There is hunger thrice denied in our breasts.*

*There is thirst never slaked in our blood.*

*They strain like hounds at the leash.*

*They threaten like hounds to be loose.*

*Beware. In black kennels all over the world  
there are hounds starving and tired of despair.*

*Growing mad and terrible. When they run amuck,  
Beware.*

## SONG FOR YOUTH

By *Anthony Lespes (Haitian Poet)*

*Translated from the French by Langston Hughes*

I know how much strength it takes to do one good deed that counts.

*Malraux*

*Youth!*

*The open door to life!*

*At last I break my silence*

*As one breaks the cords of trouble.*

*Binding the heart of a feeble man.*

*You must be restless, Youth!*

*Already I am filled with that hour*

*When you will understand, at last,*

*That daily human sacrifice*

*Made for your happiness.*

*There are men who love you*

*In every country in the world,*

*Thinking of you always, Youth,*

*But you do not always acknowledge them.*

*Millions and millions of men,*

*Shaken by pain,*

*Today lift up the curtains of the dawn*

*For the whole world.*

*Listen!*

*Like a deep and limitless river that passes,*

*Their mighty song*

*Rolls on through the night without end—*

*A tremendous human song from a multitude of men*

*Marching forward in the night,*

*Going to their deaths*

*Ignored by others,*

*Maligned by others,*

*Because they have willed through choice*

*To suffer for the creation of happiness.*



*They are the men who love you,  
Youth,  
Who have let fall  
From their hearts and from their lives  
The faces of sweethearts and the ways  
Of their own contentment.*

*Now, their song  
Spreads and grows in the shadows  
Song that is the essence of life  
Song tremendous from one end of the earth  
To the other.*

*And what that song holds  
of bitterness and hope  
Beating in their hearts,  
You must learn to understand—  
For they are the men who love you,  
In the depths of their prisons,  
In the night of their torment.*

*And if this should be a night of destiny,  
May it blessed be until the coming of the dawn.*

# BLUEPRINT FOR NEGRO WRITING

*By Richard Wright*

## 1) *The Role of Negro Writing: Two Definitions*

Generally speaking, Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a-begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as though they were French poodles who do clever tricks.

White America never offered these Negro writers any serious criticism. The mere fact that a Negro could write was astonishing. Nor was there any deep concern on the part of white America with the role Negro writing should play in American culture; and the role it did play grew out of accident rather than intent or design. Either it crept in through the kitchen in the form of jokes; or it was the fruits of that foul soil which was the result of a liason between inferiority-complexed Negro "geniuses" and burnt-out white Bohemians with money.

On the other hand, these often technically brilliant performances by Negro writers were looked upon by the majority of literate Negroes as something to be proud of. At best, Negro writing has been something external to the lives of educated Negroes themselves. That the productions of their writers should have been something of a guide in their daily living is a matter which seems never to have been raised seriously.

Under these conditions Negro writing assumed two general aspects: 1) It became a sort of conspicuous ornamentation, the hallmark of "achievement." 2) It became the voice of the educated Negro pleading with white America for justice.

Rarely was the best of this writing addressed to the Negro himself, his needs, his sufferings, his aspirations. Through misdirection, Negro writers have been far better to others than they have been to themselves. And the mere recognition of this places the whole question of Negro writing in a new light and raises a doubt as to the validity of its present direction.

## 2) *The Minority Outlook*

Somewhere in his writings Lenin makes the observation that oppressed minorities often reflect the techniques of the bourgeoisie more brilliantly than some sections of the bourgeoisie themselves. The psychological importance of this becomes meaningful when it is recalled that oppressed minorities, and especially the petty bourgeois sections of oppressed minorities, strive to assimilate the virtues of the bourgeoisie in the assumption that by doing so they can lift themselves into a higher social sphere. But not only among the oppressed petty bourgeoisie does this occur. The workers of a minority people, chafing under exploitation, forge organizational forms of struggle to better their lot. Lacking the handicaps of false ambition and property, they have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness. They display a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even do the petty bourgeoisie. Their organizations show greater strength, adaptability, and efficiency than any other group or class in society.

That Negro workers, propelled by the harsh conditions of their lives, have demonstrated this consciousness and mobility for economic and political action there can be no doubt. But has this consciousness been reflected in the work of Negro writers to the same degree as it has in the Negro workers' struggle to free Herndon and the Scottsboro Boys, in the drive toward unionism, in the fight against lynching? Have they as creative writers taken advantage of their unique minority position?

The answer decidedly is *no*. Negro writers have lagged sadly, and as time passes the gap widens between them and their people.

How can this hiatus be bridged? How can the enervating effects of this long standing split be eliminated?

In presenting questions of this sort an attitude of self-consciousness and self-criticism is far more likely to be a fruitful point of departure than a mere recounting of past achievements. An emphasis upon tendency and experiment, a view of society as something becoming rather than as something fixed and admired is the one which points the way for Negro writers to stand shoulder to shoulder with Negro workers in mood and outlook.

### 3) *A Whole Culture*

There is, however, a culture of the Negro which is his and has been addressed to him; a culture which has, for good or ill, helped to clarify his consciousness and create emotional attitudes which are conducive to action. This culture has stemmed mainly from two sources: 1) the Negro church; 2) and the folklore of the Negro people.

It was through the portals of the church that the American Negro first entered the shrine of western culture. Living under slave conditions of life, bereft of his African heritage, the Negroes' struggle for religion on the plantations between 1820-60 assumed the form of a struggle for human rights. It remained a relatively revolutionary struggle until religion began to serve as an antidote for suffering and denial. But even today there are millions of American Negroes whose only sense of a whole universe, whose only relation to society and man, and whose only guide to personal dignity comes through the archaic morphology of Christian salvation.

It was, however, in a folklore moulded out of rigorous and inhuman conditions of life that the Negro achieved his most indigenous and complete expression. Blues, spirituals, and folk tales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black

mother to her black daughter on the ways of men; the confidential wisdom of a black father to his black son; the swapping of sex experiences on street corners from boy to boy in the deepest vernacular; work songs sung under blazing suns—all these formed the channels through which the racial wisdom flowed.

One would have thought that Negro writers in the last century of striving at expression would have continued and deepened this folk tradition, would have tried to create a more intimate and yet a more profoundly social system of artistic communication between them and their people. But the illusion that they could escape through individual achievement the harsh lot of their race swung Negro writers away from any such path. Two separate cultures sprang up: one for the Negro masses, unwritten and unrecognized; and the other for the sons and daughters of a rising Negro bourgeoisie, parasitic and mannered.

Today the question is: Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, moulding the lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals, or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes' humanity?

#### 4) *The Problem of Nationalism in Negro Writing*

In stressing the difference between the role Negro writing failed to play in the lives of the Negro people, and the role it should play in the future if it is to serve its historic function; in pointing out the fact that Negro writing has been addressed in the main to a small white audience rather than to a Negro one, it should be stated that no attempt is being made here to propagate a specious and blatant nationalism. Yet the nationalist character of the Negro people is unmistakable. Psychologically this nationalism is reflected in the whole of Negro culture, and especially in folklore.

In the absence of fixed and nourishing forms of culture, the Negro has a folklore which embodies the memories and hopes of his struggle for freedom. Not yet caught in paint or stone, and as



yet but feebly depicted in the poem and novel, the Negroes' most powerful images of hope and despair still remain in the fluid state of daily speech. How many John Henrys have lived and died on the lips of these black people? How many mythical heroes in embryo have been allowed to perish for lack of husbanding by alert intelligence?

Negro folklore contains, in a measure that puts to shame more deliberate forms of Negro expression, the collective sense of Negro life in America. Let those who shy at the nationalist implications of Negro life look at this body of folklore, living and powerful, which rose out of a unified sense of a common life and a common fate. Here are those vital beginnings of a recognition of value in life as it is *lived*, a recognition that marks the emergence of a new culture in the shell of the old. And at the moment this process starts, at the moment when a people begin to realize a *meaning* in their suffering, the civilization that engenders that suffering is doomed.

The nationalist aspects of Negro life are as sharply manifest in the social institutions of Negro people as in folklore. There is a Negro church, a Negro press, a Negro social world, a Negro sporting world, a Negro business world, a Negro school system, Negro professions; in short, a Negro way of life in America. The Negro people did not ask for this, and deep down, though they express themselves through their institutions and adhere to this special way of life, they do not want it now. This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope, bayonet and mob rule. They accepted these negative conditions with the inevitability of a tree which must live or perish in whatever soil it finds itself.

The few crumbs of American civilization which the Negro has got from the tables of capitalism have been through these segregated channels. Many Negro institutions are cowardly and incompetent; but they are all that the Negro has. And, in the main, any

move, whether for progress or reaction, must come through these institutions for the simple reason that all other channels are closed. Negro writers who seek to mould or influence the consciousness of the Negro people must address their messages to them through the ideologies and attitudes fostered in this warping way of life.

##### 5) *The Basis and Meaning of Nationalism in Negro Writing*

The social institutions of the Negro are imprisoned in the Jim Crow political system of the South, and this Jim Crow political system is in turn built upon a plantation-feudal economy. Hence, it can be seen that the emotional expression of group-feeling which puzzles so many whites and leads them to deplore what they call "black chauvinism" is not a morbidly inherent trait of the Negro, but rather the reflex expression of a life whose roots are imbedded deeply in Southern soil.

Negro writers must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. They must accept the concept of nationalism because, in order to transcend it, they must *possess* and *understand* it. And a nationalist spirit in Negro writing means a nationalism carrying the highest possible pitch of social consciousness. It means a nationalism that knows its origins, its limitations; that is aware of the dangers of its position; that knows its ultimate aims are unrealizable within the framework of capitalist America; a nationalism whose reason for being lies in the simple fact of self-possession and in the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society.

For purposes of creative expression it means that the Negro writer must realize within the area of his own personal experience those impulses which, when prefigured in terms of broad social movements, constitute the stuff of nationalism.

For Negro writers even more so than for Negro politicians, nationalism is a bewildering and vexing question, the full ramifica-

tions of which cannot be dealt with here. But among Negro workers and the Negro middle class the spirit of nationalism is rife in a hundred devious forms; and a simple literary realism which seeks to depict the lives of these people devoid of wider social connotations, devoid of the revolutionary significance of these nationalist tendencies, must of necessity do a rank injustice to the Negro people and alienate their possible allies in the struggle for freedom.

#### 6) *Social Consciousness and Responsibility*

The Negro writer who seeks to function within his race as a purposeful agent has a serious responsibility. In order to do justice to his subject matter, in order to depict Negro life in all of its manifold and intricate relationships, a deep, informed, and complex consciousness is necessary; a consciousness which draws for its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people, and moulds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today.

With the gradual decline of the moral authority of the Negro church, and with the increasing irresolution which is paralyzing Negro middle class leadership, a new role is devolving upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die.

By his ability to fuse and make articulate the experiences of men, because his writing possesses the potential cunning 'to steal into the inmost recesses of the human heart, because he can create the myths and symbols that inspire a faith in life, he may expect either to be consigned to oblivion, or to be recognized for the valued agent he is.

This raises the question of the personality of the writer. It means that in the lives of Negro writers must be found those materials and experiences which will create a meaningful picture of the world today. Many young writers have grown to believe that a Marxist analysis of society presents such a picture. It creates a picture which, when placed before the eyes of the writer, should unify

his personality, organize his emotions, buttress him with a tense and obdurate will to change the world.

And, in turn, this changed world will dialectically change the writer. Hence, it is through a Marxist conception of reality and society that the maximum degree of freedom in thought and feeling can be gained for the Negro writer. Further, this dramatic Marxist vision, when consciously grasped, endows the writer with a sense of dignity which no other vision can give. Ultimately, it restores to the writer his lost heritage, that is, his role as a creator of the world in which he lives, and as a creator of himself.

Yet, for the Negro writer, Marxism is but the starting point. No theory of life can take the place of life. After Marxism has laid bare the skeleton of society, there remains the task of the writer to plant flesh upon those bones out of his will to live. He may, with disgust and revulsion, say *no* and depict the horrors of capitalism encroaching upon the human being. Or he may, with hope and passion, say *yes* and depict the faint stirrings of a new and emerging life. But in whatever social voice he chooses to speak, whether positive or negative, there should always be heard or *over-heard* his faith, his necessity, his judgement.

His vision need not be simple or rendered in primer-like terms; for the life of the Negro people is not simple. The presentation of their lives should be simple, yes; but all the complexity, the strangeness, the magic wonder of life that plays like a bright sheen over the most sordid existence, should be there. To borrow a phrase from the Russians, it should have a *complex simplicity*. Eliot, Stein, Joyce, Proust, Hemingway, and Anderson; Gorky, Barbusse, Nexö, and Jack London no less than the folklore of the Negro himself should form the heritage of the Negro writer. Every iota of gain in human thought and sensibility should be ready grist for his mill, no matter how far-fetched they may seem in their immediate implications.

### 7) *The Problem of Perspective*

What vision must Negro writers have before their eyes in order to feel the impelling necessity for an about face? What angle of vision can show them all the forces of modern society in process, all the lines of economic development converging toward a distant point of hope? Must they believe in some "ism"?

They may feel that only dupes believe in "isms"; they feel with some measure of justification that another commitment means only another disillusionment. But anyone destitute of a theory about the meaning, structure and direction of modern society is a lost victim in a world he cannot understand or control.

But even if Negro writers found themselves through some "ism," how would that influence their writing? Are they being called upon to "preach"? To be "salesmen"? To "prostitute" their writing? Must they "sully" themselves? Must they write "propaganda"?

No; it is a question of awareness, of consciousness; it is, above all, a question of perspective.

Perspective is that part of a poem, novel, or play which a writer never puts directly upon paper. It is that fixed point in intellectual space where a writer stands to view the struggles, hopes, and sufferings of his people. There are times when he may stand too close and the result is a blurred vision. Or he may stand too far away and the result is a neglect of important things.

Of all the problems faced by writers who as a whole have never allied themselves with world movements, perspective is the most difficult of achievement. At its best, perspective is a pre-conscious assumption, something which a writer takes for granted, something which he wins through his living.

A Spanish writer recently spoke of living in the heights of one's time. Surely, perspective means just *that*.

It means that a Negro writer must learn to view the life of a Negro living in New York's Harlem or Chicago's South Side with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class. It means that a Negro writer must create in his readers' minds a relationship between a Negro woman hoeing cotton in the South and the men who loll in swivel chairs in Wall Street and take the fruits of her toil.

Perspective for Negro writers will come when they have looked and brooded so hard and long upon the harsh lot of their race and compared it with the hopes and struggles of minority peoples everywhere that the cold facts have begun to tell them something.

#### 8) *The Problem of Theme*

This does not mean that a Negro writer's sole concern must be with rendering the social scene; but if his conception of the life of his people is broad and deep enough, if the sense of the *whole* life he is seeking is vivid and strong in him, then his writing will embrace all those social, political, and economic forms under which the life of his people is manifest.

In speaking of theme one must necessarily be general and abstract; the temperament of each writer moulds and colors the world he sees. Negro life may be approached from a thousand angles, with no limit to technical and stylistic freedom.

Negro writers spring from a family, a clan, a class, and a nation; and the social units in which they are bound have a story, a record. Sense of theme will emerge in Negro writing when Negro writers try to fix this story about some pole of meaning, remembering as they do so that in the creative process meaning proceeds *equally* as much from the contemplation of the subject matter as from the hopes and apprehensions that rage in the heart of the writer.

Reduced to its simplest and most general terms, theme for Negro writers will rise from understanding the meaning of their being



transplanted from a "savage" to a "civilized" culture in all of its social, political, economic, and emotional implications. It means that Negro writers must have in their consciousness the foreshortened picture of the *whole*, nourishing culture from which they were torn in Africa, and of the long, complex (and for the most part, unconscious) struggle to regain in some form and under alien conditions of life a *whole* culture again.

It is not only this picture they must have, but also a knowledge of the social and emotional milieu that gives it tone and solidity of detail. Theme for Negro writers will emerge when they have begun to feel the meaning of the history of their race as though they in one life time had lived it themselves throughout all the long centuries.

### 9) *Autonomy of Craft*

For the Negro writer to depict this new reality requires a greater discipline and consciousness than was necessary for the so-called Harlem school of expression. Not only is the subject matter dealt with far more meaningful and complex, but the new role of the writer is qualitatively different. The Negro writers' new position demands a sharper definition of the status of his craft, and a sharper emphasis upon its functional autonomy.

Negro writers should seek through the medium of their craft to play as meaningful a role in the affairs of men as do other professionals. But if their writing is demanded to perform the social office of other professions, then the autonomy of craft is lost and writing detrimentally fused with other interests. The limitations of the craft constitute some of its greatest virtues. If the sensory vehicle of imaginative writing is required to carry too great a load of didactic material, the artistic sense is submerged.

The relationship between reality and the artistic image is not always direct and simple. The imaginative conception of a historical period will not be a carbon copy of reality. Image and emotion possess a logic of their own. A vulgarized simplicity constitutes the

greatest danger in tracing the reciprocal interplay between the writer and his environment.

Writing has its professional autonomy; it should complement other professions, but it should not supplant them or be swamped by them.

#### 10) *The Necessity for Collective Work*

It goes without saying that these things cannot be gained by Negro writers if their present mode of isolated writing and living continues. This isolation exists *among* Negro writers as well as *between* Negro and white writers. The Negro writers' lack of thorough integration with the American scene, their lack of a clear realization among themselves of their possible role, have bred generation after generation of embittered and defeated literati.

Barred for decades from the theater and publishing houses, Negro writers have been *made* to feel a sense of difference. So deep has this white-hot iron of exclusion been burnt into their hearts that thousands have all but lost the desire to become identified with American civilization. The Negro writers' acceptance of this enforced isolation and their attempt to justify it is but a defense-reflex of the whole special way of life which has been rammed down their throats.

This problem, by its very nature, is one which must be approached contemporaneously from *two* points of view. The ideological unity of Negro writers and the alliance of that unity with all the progressive ideas of our day is the primary prerequisite for collective work. On the shoulders of white writers and Negro writers alike rest the responsibility of ending this mistrust and isolation.

By placing cultural health above narrow sectional prejudices, liberal writers of all races can help to break the stony soil of aggrandizement out of which the stunted plants of Negro nationalism grow. And, simultaneously, Negro writers can help to weed out

these choking growths of reactionary nationalism and replace them with hardier and sturdier types.

These tasks are imperative in light of the fact that we live in a time when the majority of the most basic assumptions of life can no longer be taken for granted. Tradition is no longer a guide. The world has grown huge and cold. Surely this is the moment to ask questions, to theorize, to speculate, to wonder out of what materials can a human world be built.

Each step along this unknown path should be taken with thought, care, self-consciousness, and deliberation. When Negro writers think they have arrived at something which smacks of truth, humanity, they should want to test it with others, feel it with a degree of passion and strength that will enable them to communicate it to millions who are groping like themselves.

Writers faced with such tasks can have no possible time for malice or jealousy. The conditions for the growth of each writer depend too much upon the good work of other writers. Every first rate novel, poem, or play lifts the level of consciousness higher.

## A NOTE ON NEGRO NATIONALISM

*By Allyn Keith*

There has been much discussion lately of nationalism, and whether or not it may be used in connection with the revolutionary movement. One side argues an incompatibility between nationalism and the revolutionary program, the other a useful conjunction. In the present discussion there is a twofold purpose: 1) To describe the various groups pledging themselves to what they consider is nationalism, 2) To reveal the conflicting assumptions among them with some remarks regarding the role of nationalism in a radical philosophy.

The most important expression of nationalism is perhaps the isolationist. This school contends that the nationalism of minority

peoples differ from that of others in that it is the aspirations of a submerged group to attain political independence. This political desire is a natural outgrowth of cultural autonomy. These aspirations spring from the commonly shared interests of race, tongue and history, and are the psychological correlatives of and stimuli to the political struggle for freedom. The oppression of minorities presents a conflict situation that is the pre-condition of nationalism's outward manifestation and establishes the basis of a solidifying of attitudes which may be called a) separatist, and, b) racially centered. It must be remembered that these are aspects of the isolationist outlook. The first attitude implies the following: That though a few may be exempt from this charge, by and large the vast majority of whites is responsible for the plight of the Negro. That majority has frustrated and side-tracked efforts for amelioration, not to say freedom. It would be folly to consider it as an ally—potential or actual. The whites are unalterably the Negro's enemy, hence separation from the enemy is at once logical and sensible.

The second attitude is but a corollary of the first. If the Negro reacts negatively to the whites, then he must have a program of his own to more or less govern him, as well as some means to make his program realizable. This self-reliant aspect of isolationism must draw tellingly upon our racial resources: artistic, economic and educational to foster a racial consciousness. When this is achieved, the Negro possesses the means by which his emancipation shall be accomplished. Thus we may note that the implications objectified in terms of the dual attitudes are that 1) the whites are undifferentiatedly blameable for the Negro's troubles and, hence, 2) the culture of the latter must be drawn on to whip up racial interest and pride for purposes of liberation.

Though this is the major school of thought in this field, there are two other expressions that stand opposed to this though not themselves compatible. The first of this second group we may call cultural nationalism and the other "cooperative" nationalism.

Let us review the latter position. Minority group experience and life in general are qualitatively unique. It is the task of the artist to give such form and significance to this experience as would promote a given political end by means of cultural agencies. Such a treatment based on and utilizing the nation's experience would constitute a nationalistic outlook. And the response of the people occasioned by the representation of their suffering and oppression is then thought of as nationalistic. Thus any program, political, civil, etc., claiming to aid a subject people must sound the depth of these experiences and construct on them—not ignore them. And this is no less true of an artistic evaluation of Negro life seeking through cultural life to make some impress on the Negro problem. After the Negro is united on the basis of some nationalistic idea, i.e., an idea capitalizing on the fund of resentment and hatred binding Negroes together and alienating them from other racial strains, the transition to inter-racial cooperation may be effected through skilful leadership and guidance. Here the role of the writer assumes a growing importance. The re-channelizing of the nationalism from anti-white to inter-racial avenues becomes the pressing problem of all, and authors in particular. They are thus involved in a responsibility that commands a close scrutiny of their political direction to the end that a sound basis for adequate insight and leadership be provided. This then is the belief of this faction, that the hostile energies and spirits of the Negro for the whites may be dammed up and under proper control be released and sluiced through inter-racial grooves, and thus be employed in a socially beneficial manner.

The emphasis of the other point of view is quite different. It begins by defining nationalism as the rightful and just pride the Negro has and should have in his cultural contribution to civilization. The central ideas of racial animosity, of separatism, of being racially centered as a defense reflex to an unsympathetic and antagonistic white world are—it will be noticed—excluded. Such usage ignores the historical context from which the term acquires both its validity and emotional meaning. We will arbitrarily dismiss this



outlook on the grounds that it is not tangent to the Negro problem as presently colored and conditioned. Which is not to deny that this same perspective may be much more important after the solving of this issue.

Now for an examination of these groups and their racial philosophies. Do sharecroppers—black and white—unite on a nationalistic basis or by means of a nationalistic impetus? Are inter-racial committees formed by reason of the same stimulus? Does a forthright literary expression of Negro nationalism like Walter White's *Fire in the Flint* validate any of the ideas reported above? Can the confused and romanticized treatment of the Negro, or better the colored problem, in DuBois' *Dark Princess* be used as a case in point to illustrate one of the above doctrines?

The isolationist problem is untenable because the Negro's problem cannot be disposed of by the Negro alone. And this is the lowest terms of this point of view: racial and not inter-racial action. But to perceive that other sources of help are required and desired for the ends in view is to accept unconsciously another idea that is more basic for it requires the rejection of the other. That race is not the lowest common denominator of group activity toward social improvement is tacitly admitted by the new social program based on the conception of the common humanity of all peoples, or on the idea of class society.

The sharecroppers no longer blind to their mutual interest gravitate into one common union. Their common class position makes them acclaim their humanity, their oneness. The cooperation had to be based on the realization that black and white are not foes but are alike victims of a uniform and general practice. Such a realization translating itself into class—and not racial—alignments negates and repudiates the underlying thought of the isolationist school. As regards the non-isolationist theorists it is clear that they were attributing concrete results to nationalism, when these results were the outcome of the very opposite of race: the outcome of the



conviction of human and not Negro rights. For does not cooperation between black and white, inter-racial committees, etc. at once deny the efficacy of isolation on the one hand and on the other assert the validity of humanitarian assistance which undermines the declarations of the "cooperative" nationalist.

A serious writer's first task is the honest depiction of his characters in terms of the reality in which they live. He must, then, be a true part of the scene and group of which he writes. Sympathetically and logically, he must be able to fuse event, source and characterization. For this reason, the Negro writer returning to the soil folk and the industrial masses as creative sources must be intellectually and emotionally alert. He must know the true difference between nationalism as a limiting concept and nationalism as a phase which is difficult but rich in the materials for progress into wider channels.

May we not conclude from the foregoing analysis that the revolutionary movement cannot employ nationalism in its pure expression as isolationism to further its cause? Nor can it permit the humanitarian basis of operation of "cooperative nationalism" to remain unrevealed, for any disclosure of the true philosophy guiding this group will serve to gather more adherents to a worthy cause as well as to dispel some incorrect notions on this subject.

## PROBLEMS FACING THE NEGRO WRITER TODAY

*By Eugene C. Holmes*

The problems of the Negro writer, whether he wills it or no, are bound up with the fight against fascism and the protection of the cultural rights of minority groups. This will be denied in strong terms by those individualistic writers who will proclaim their insulation as well as by those leftist writers whose pleasure it is to yawp that an American fascism and European fascism would never

be of anywhere near the same ingredients. There are a few Negro and white writers today who have experienced the nearness of such a menace, those whose imaginations do not stretch in pondering over its eventuality. Langston Hughes, who was chased out of Carmel and forbidden to read his poems in Los Angeles, and Sterling Brown, who knows the terror of the lynch-ridden South, would not be sanguine about the exemption of the Negro writer under an American fascism. There should not be much necessity for an answer to those who refuse to admit the nearness of this menace. The evidence is so alarmingly omnipresent. But there is a necessity in making the Negro writer see that his place is on the side of those who are in the anti-fascist struggle. That is why Negro writers do have obligations, along with white writers, not only for the protection of their craft, but also in defense of the culture fascism will seek to destroy.

There has been a scarcity of literary output by Negro writers in the last year or two. This is true of those whose fiction and verse has pursued a militant and class conscious position, and as one would expect it to be, of the world-weary, our-burden-is-hard-school. The reasons for this scarcity are hard to find. There have been only three novels by Negroes of any scope, Arna Bontemps' *Black Thunder*, George Lee's *River George* and O'Wendell Shaw's *Greater Need Below*. The verse of Richard Wright, Sterling Brown, Frank Davis, Owen Dodson, and Langston Hughes has appeared only sporadically. Claude McKay has rewarded us with his autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*. There have been a few plays produced by the Federal Theatre Project in New York. A number of novels by white writers have appeared which have Negro themes, but only four of them would be worth considering: James Saxon Childer's *A Novel about a Black Man and a White Man in the Deep South*, Hamilton Basso's *Courthouse Square*, Lyle Saxon's *Children of Strangers*, and America's favorite, *Gone With the Wind*. It is not our specific intention to make any critical analysis of all of these works. Our purpose will be to show by examples what part this literature has played and can play in the struggle going around us.

*Gone With the Wind*, for example, illustrates a lesson which should have significance.<sup>4</sup> In this poorly constructed novel there is the nostalgic yearning for the days of the old South. There is the parading of all of the old stereotypes, the portraiture of the Negro as rapist and thief, as contented and loyal, all of which endeared the book to a certain section of the American reading public. Childers' novel, if anything, is intensely and sincerely written. In this novel he describes the dangerous friendship which existed between an educated white man and an educated black man who had been in the same university in the North. But when the author allows himself a sociological chapter on Harlem, he delivers himself of the following: "Harlem was neither handmade nor born of a military domination inspired by commercial need; instead Harlem is a longing, a craving, a part answer and a prophecy . . . Harlem is very incidentally a place where black orchestras drain white pocketbooks at a cover charge of two dollars and a half a person, where tan and sinuous hips writhe for white excitation . . . (it is) a unique racial verve born of the individual and fostered by the group which disappears at the approach of a white man and remains in hiding behind the most punctilious courtesy, or, among the lower social and intellectual classes, parades its racial distrusts and animosities in scowls and mutterings . . . until today Harlem is owned by Negroes, property valued at one hundred million dollars is today owned by Negroes in Harlem." Now most of this is hasty generalization and faulty reasoning, while the last sentence has almost no truth. It is this sort of thing which brings sharp criticism, for it is this setting forth of harmful generalizations which foster the stereotyping so characteristic of American literature.

Bontemps has done an extremely valuable and pioneering job in his historical novel, *Black Thunder*. He has delved into the revolutionary traditions of the Negro people, extracted from them the story of the heroic struggles of Gabriel, and limned this glowing tale into an unforgettable account of folk courage. In doing this he has not only enriched the field of the Negro novel, but he has shown Negroes themselves that they were worthy subjects for de-

piction rather than for the purple romancing which has been their literary lot for so long. In this true story of one of the major slave insurrections, Bontemps has added to the contemporary historical novel. He might have painted Gabriel more convincingly, as a product of the forces of the time rather than in terms of only personal action. The essential thing is that the story has been told. A new field has been opened and it is writing of this kind which will reflect the true traditions of an oppressed people, give that people a more correct view of itself as a folk, and add to that culture writers should be called upon to defend.

In both Shaw's and Lee's novels, there are sincere attempts to get away from the conventional themes and to expose in their pages other serried sides of Negro life. Shaw is successful in drawing away the veils that have enshrouded the average Negro college community in the South. He shows the close connection between the business and local interests and the State control, the inordinate power of the financial administrators, the uncle tomism of certain types, the reasons for the sectional prejudices among Negroes, the almost hopeless terror that exists, and many other hitherto undisclosed characteristics of the southern Negro college community. But Shaw goes completely haywire in his solutions. A gamut of crackpot and utopian schemes are suggested. And in the end the heroine's mother becomes extremely wealthy from the manufacture of hair preparations and endows a school of Negro business for the hero. Lee, whose *Beale Street* attracted a deal of attention last year, knows his South. Had Lee stuck to portraying one locale, say the sharecropping country he seems to know so well, he might have been more successful. Describing, rather, college life, sharecroppers' huts, Beale Street, the waterfront and a half dozen other locales, in this case makes too complicated a melange and lessens the novel's effectiveness. His depiction of the sharecroppers' and waterfront workers' struggles is realistic enough, but the characters never seem to be real. The picture is too many-sided. Lee defeats his purpose in employing too many pencils at one time. Much in both novels can and will serve socially valuable purposes. Their drawbacks

serve as lessons, the results of which supply a needed clarification of the American scene.

Now the poetry, though not as fulsome or prolific, has become more mature and less anaemic. Cliches and archaisms are rapidly disappearing. The work of Brown, Wright, Dodson, and Davis, gains in stature as it does in content. These poets seem to be imbued with the notion that they are creating for something, for the literature of a people. When Brown writes of sharecroppers, and Dodson of Negro history in sonnet sequences, and Hughes of steelworkers, and Wright of we of the streets, and Davis of Ethiopia, there is noticeable a consciousness and aim that is an advance over the ideological content of these poets two years ago. It is specially noteworthy that the poets who have something to say have found it necessary to foresake the old themes if they are going to write of Negro life in newer terms. This does not mean that Negro poets must write only about Negro themes. They will write what they please and about what they know best. But it does mean that if the field of Negro poetry is to be oriented and revitalized, and if it is to keep pace with the progressive currents in American literature, it must gear its sails accordingly. No one has prescribed what these poets write. They are writing what they feel and know about people and the life around them, and that is the essence of great literature.

One might think that the Negro writer, with his special problems as a member of the most exploited of minority groups, and knowing what has been the tragic fate of minority groups under fascism, would be among the first to take up the cudgels in the defense of the rights of the exploited minorities. His problems as a writer are really special. The Negro writer is always running into the wall of American prejudice and discrimination, into the obsequiousness of publishers' offices, into social ostracism when he kicks over the hurdles of his community, and into the glaring problem of making a living as a writer. But the problems of Negro writers and their seeming apathy and slow awakening to the realities of decadent capitalism and war-mad imperialism has a deeper basis.



This basis is founded upon the class origins and background of these Negro writers, who, strangely enough, are among the least class conscious of minority groups. The most important reason for this is their too recent emergence as a class into the arena of a middle-class civilization. It was not a new class, it was hybrid, for it was swathed in the economics of the proletariat, but imbued, naturally enough, with the American-dream desires of the middle classes. That is why so many of them, who thought they were graduated from the class they had learned to despise, found it so easy to don the garb of the dominant culture and imitate its tinsel patterns. This has been true of most of our writers who succumbed too easily into the slough and glitter of prevailing convention.

Fortunately, the scene is changing. And not only because there are a few more writers who do have working class backgrounds, but also because others have been made cryingly aware of the emptiness of bourgeois shibboleths. They have witnessed the rape of Ethiopia and the destruction of Guernica. They have been made increasingly aware of the degradation and anarchy in capitalist culture. It is to these writers and their friends that additional appeals are made. We cannot prescribe what it is that these writers can do. One thing, however, is certain. They can be conscious of the different ways in which they can translate the dangers we have been mentioning to the Negro people. One thing they can guard against: they must not write of their locality, of Reeltown or of State Street, as Childers writes of Harlem. They can apply their scalpels to the obscure class alignments and class divisions of these sections, for by doing this they will help a great deal in rescuing those living human forces, so potential as reservoirs for actions.

I think that it is logically inescapable, from all that we have said here, that it is never possible for us to separate the creative work of an artist from his philosophy or his consciousness. It is equally obvious that the economic basis of society is reflected in artistic creation through the political views of the artist and the class to which he belongs, and through the morals and conceptions of jus-



tice the writer holds. That is why the consciousness is active in the material production he undertakes. And because it is active, the work of art he produces should reflect the epoch, the movement of social forces, the struggle of classes, the political motives, the hopes and fears of his own people. There should be no objections from sincere writers who are anti-fascist, and who are anxious to defend culture, to wanting to see their work considered as products of the social, intellectual and emotional activity of man. Such writers will possess more of a resolve and desire to respect historical truth and detail. They will realize that they are playing an active part in the world in which they live, and above all they will be contributing to that very culture which they should pledge themselves to defend. These, then, are minimal obligations and tasks which face the Negro writer. They prove, I think, that there are some things in this world which require not only dogmatic assertion, but also categorical imperatives. If these writers want to live in a favorable climate, if they want to breathe air in a free and democratic society, if they want to preserve the amenities of their craft, there is only one path open for them, and that is enlistment in the fight against war and fascism.

## THE BALLETS OF WILLIAM GRANT STILL

*By Verna Arvey*

An interesting phase of the American ballet is expressed by the young William Grant Still, himself representative of all the presumably necessary attributes of an American composer. He was a student of Chadwick and Varese, opposite poles of musical thought. At one time or another he has played most of the instruments in the orchestra, whence comes the intimate knowledge that leads to his striking orchestrations. He was also once associated with jazz, that typically American expression. To his youth may be attributed his spontaneity. He prefers to let his Negroid characteristics display themselves in the structure of his works, rather than on the surface. From such a background his music contains the elements of greatness and of permanence, for it makes a direct appeal to the heart.

For many years Still had been gathering themes and putting them into a little notebook, almost all of them exactly as he later used them in the most American of all his ballets. Suddenly Columbia Broadcasting System invited him to create a musical work designed especially for radio. Soon *Lenox Avenue* (a series of eleven orchestral episodes with intermittent spoken lines for the announcer) was completed. Although apparently the inspiration of the moment, it was really the accumulation of years of thought.

After the composition was complete in its orchestral form, Still realized that it would also make an effective ballet: a series of choreographic street scenes typical of modern Negroid life, and he immediately set to work to give *Lenox Avenue* a new form. Thus it has a dual identity. He avows a similarity in the theme of this orchestral piece, or ballet, to that of his opera, *Blue Steel* and insists that it happened purposely, to ally the voodoo theme of the opera with the raucous rhythms of contemporary life as expressed in the shorter work.

If Still's *Lenox Avenue* is jazz (and many will insist that it is, though it was not intended to be), then the source of jazz is truly established once and for all, since these motives are characteristic and entirely original with the composer. They were suggested to him by infrequent excursions into night club life, and frequent visits to revival meetings in search of little-known spirituals for which he has a genuine fondness. In this way he succeeded in re-creating the actual atmosphere while not adhering to themes invented by strangers. If Still's ballet music is primitive, it is because he is himself—sincere and can therefore create only what comes to him naturally—*as do primitives!* In addition Still has added to his creations the sophistication, the polish and the knowledge he has gained and that is, in effect, his heritage.

Still's approach to the composition of dance music is unique. He had seen Pavlova dance, and though her artistry impressed him deeply, he was even then searching for newer, broader forms of

choreographic expression in music. Thus his music is rhythmic in such a distinctive way that it can only be adequately choreographed with modern, free movements: the realization of his mental vision. His music is also conducive to sustained movements, not erraticisms. Instead of mentally picturing actual dance steps, he visualized the general trend and feeling of each dance. Often he would conceive a dance in its elemental form and make the music, in pitch and in rhythmic values, correspond to that form: the pitch determining the dancer's movement in space; the rhythm determining the foot or floor patterns.

Still's realization that the ballet was a form that even he might adopt for musical expression came about through Adolph Bolm who, while on a trip to South America, became fascinated by Lafcadio Hearn's tales of Martinique. On his arrival in New York, he sought out Still, who he thought, would be the one American composer most likely to feel such an atmosphere most accurately. He loaned Still the book by Hearn, suggesting the theme of *La Guiablesse* for a ballet. Then from Chicago, Bolm commissioned Still's ballet *La Guiablesse*.

Bolm made many excellent suggestions on the receipt of Still's first score. The composer took the ballet back for extensive revisions. One of Bolm's precepts about ballet-writing appealed to Still as being applicable to anything one might create, in any form: to say what one has to say as briefly as possible.

Still's earliest compositions were all scrapped and whatever was good in them incorporated into a larger work. Thus the *Dance of Love* is now an integral part of the *Sorcerer* ballet, and the *Dance of the Carnal Flowers* was, with very few changes, written into *La Guiablesse*. The former ballet is rather more pantomimic than active and was never produced. It has not as much vitality as his other ballets, and Still planned to transform it into an opera. The latter ballet (*La Guiablesse*) is a tri-cornered story set against a colorful background of intrigue and vitality. An excellent setting

for dance movement. It was written in first draft before Still's *Sahdji*. His revision followed the creation of *Sahdji*.

The music has an individual appeal, more a blend into dance movement than subservience to it. Critics wrote that it was far above the average ballet music. *La Guiablesse* herself is a devilish creature who appears in the guise of a beautiful woman to lure the susceptible youth to his death. The score of the ballet is vigorous and sophisticated, and the rhythmic patterns are (as always in Still's music) bizarre. It is on the whole choreographic music. That is to say, it needs a choreographic interpretation corresponding to the lack of superficiality in the music. Before writing *La Guiablesse*, the composer studied West Indian and Creole musical material, but was not impressed by it. He determined to create his own themes as being truer to scene and mood.

The scene of *La Guiablesse* is laid on the island of Martinique. The opening theme is that of the temptress. This appears also throughout the text, culminating in the concluding funeral march, thereby giving a strong unity to the ballet. However, the "she-devil" herself is introduced by a distant contralto solo: a haunting, wordless melody.

"*La Guiablesse* is a work of talent. *Sahdji* is a work of genius!" an observer once remarked of Still's music. Indeed, it is only after a careful study of these two ballet scores that one realizes the truth of that remark.

*Sahdji* is Still's ballet for orchestra, chorus (singing a text relating incidents in the action), and for bass chanter (reciting ominous African proverbs). The scene is laid in old Africa: a hunting feast of the Azande tribe, when *Sahdji*, a woman who loves life intensely, must die with her dead husband, the chieftain Konumbju, while her sweetheart, Mrabo, assumes the leadership of the tribe. The scenario is by Richard Bruce and Alain Locke.

Even as Still had investigated West Indian and Creole material for *La Guiblessé*, so he spent approximately eighteen months studying African lore in preparation for the writing of *Sahdji*. The effect of this study was more satisfactory. His first desire was simply to absorb the atmosphere so that he would be able to write in an African idiom without using actual folk material. The *Invitation Dance*, where Sahdji tempts Mrabo, came to him first. Around it, the ballet was built.

Still did not have in mind a reversion to ancient ideals when he wrote this ballet, yet it would be difficult to find any other modern work which contains so many elements of the old Greek drama without being constructed on a Greek subject: the chorus moving rhythmically as it sings, morals pointed by a portentous, lonely figure (the Chanter, a bass soloist), as well as the masterly orchestral accompaniment, skilfully mirroring the moods of each moment.

The dramatic quality of the music is apparent even in the short introduction to the ballet, and in the melodic prologue sung by the Chanter before the ballet begins. (Incidentally, this is a late addition to the ballet, the most important change made during Still's recent revision of *Sahdji*.) In *Sahdji*, the dances were so completely visualized that the composer was able to write a full description of them into the score. During the chants Still has indicated stage actions, for example the women's rhythmic clapping during the men's chant.

Nathan Emanuel, who danced the leading role of Mrabo in the initial presentation of *Sahdji* at Rochester, considered it the easiest to perform of all the American ballets presented there, since the music is so dramatic and so suggestive of every emotion, and since the composer had spared no energy to give the performers detailed notes as to the way he wished his creation presented. There was but one difficulty in the production. One of the more lyric dances (in the orchestral version) had sounded intensely dramatic in the



piano reduction to which the dancers had made their dances. They had, of course, suited their actions to the sound. When they heard the orchestral version, they had to re-cast the entire dance.

The music of *Sabdj*, praised by the Rochester critics who twice witnessed the ballet, and by Olin Downes, who was struck by the intensity of the score, is a classic of its kind. It is elemental drama because it is a stylization of the folk impulse, of folk ceremonials, and of the emotional tempests underlying primitive life. In addition, Still's ballet music gives detailed attention to the dramatic meaning of each dance, or episode, in relation to the ballet as a whole. Everything is part of a harmonious whole. Nothing is wasted, nothing superfluous.

There is a short ballet in Still's opera, *Blue Steel*, but this, far from being thrown into the proceedings with a total disregard for its necessity as opera ballets used to be, arises from a need in the story and serves as a symbol of the opera's theme: a keynote of mysterious tribal rites in the mythical swamp. It is so bizarrely scored that one must hear the complete opera to recognize it as a part. It is obvious, from its instrumentation, that it is an important element in the whole. Still is of the opinion that his own style is best suited to works for the stage. "I am naturally an economical person," he has declared, "and it is hard to be economical in large works for orchestra."

*From the Black Belt*, Still's short suite for chamber orchestra, contains a dance movement. His *The Black Man Dances* for piano and orchestra consists of four Negro dances depicting as many phases in the life of the race, from Africa to North America. Still used an original blues theme in this, as he did in *Lenox Avenue*. He also based his entire *Afro-American Symphony* on just such a theme, developed and inverted. He did not write jazz, as such, but succeeded in making it portray his subject. He believes the blues to be more characteristically Negroid than many spirituals, since they exhibit no trace of Caucasian influence.



## SPIRITUAL TRUANCY

*A Long Way From Home*, by Claude McKay. New York: Lee Furman, Inc. \$3.00.

When in 1928, from self-imposed exile, Claude Mc Kay wrote *Home to Harlem*, many of us hoped that a prose and verse writer of stellar talent would himself come home, physically and psychologically, to take a warranted and helpful place in the group of "New Negro" writers. But although now back on the American scene and obviously attached to Harlem by literary adoption, this undoubted talent is still spiritually unmoored, and by the testimony of this latest book, is a longer way from home than ever. A critical reader would know this without his own confession; but Mr. McKay, exposing others, succeeds by chronic habit in exposing himself and paints an apt spiritual portrait in two sentences when he says: "I had wandered far and away until I had grown into a truant by nature and undomesticated in the blood"—and later,—"I am so intensely subjective as a poet, that I was not aware, at the moment of writing, that I was transformed into a medium to express a mass sentiment." All of which amounts to self-characterization as the unabashed "playboy of the Negro Renaissance".

Real spokesmanship and representative character in the "Negro Renaissance",—or for that matter any movement, social or cultural,—may depend, of course, on many factors according to time and circumstance, but basic and essential, at least, are the acceptance of some group loyalty and the intent, as well as the ability, to express mass sentiment. Certainly and peculiarly in this case: otherwise the caption of race is a misnomer and the racial significance so irrelevant as to be silly. We knew before 1925 that Negroes could be poets; what we forecast and expected were Negro writers expressing a folk in expressing themselves. Artists have a right to be individualists, of course, but if their work assumes racial expression and interpretation, they must abide by it. On this issue, then, instead of repudiating racialism and its implied loyalties, Mr.

Mc Kay blows hot and cold with the same breath; erratically accepting and rejecting racial representatives, like a bad boy who admits he ought to go to school and then plays truant. It is this spiritual truancy which is the blight of his otherwise splendid talent.

Lest this seem condemnation out of court, let us examine the record. If out of a half dozen movements to which there could have been some deep loyalty of attachment, none has claimed Mc Kay's whole-hearted support, then surely this career is not one of cosmopolitan experiment or even of innocent vagabondage, but, as I have already implied, one of chronic and perverse truancy. It is with the record of these picaresque wanderings that Mc Kay crowds the pages of *A Long Way from Home*. First, there was a possible brilliant spokespersonship of the Jamaican peasant-folk, for it was as their balladist that Mc Kay first attracted attention and help from his West Indian patrons. But that was soon discarded for a style and philosophy of aesthetic individualism in the then current mode of pagan impressionism. As the author of this personalism,—so unrecognizable after the tangy dialect of the Clarendon hill-folk,—

*'Your voice is the colour of a robin's breast*

*And there's a sweet sob in it like rain,*

*Still rain in the night among the leaves of the trumpet tree'*

Mc Kay emigrated to our shores and shortly adopted the social realism and racial Negro notes of *Harlem Shadows* and *The Harlem Dancer*. These were among the first firmly competent accents of New Negro poetry, and though an adopted son, Mc Kay was hailed as the day-star of that bright dawn. However, by his own admission playing off Max Eastman against Frank Harris and James Oppenheimer, he rapidly moved out toward the humanitarian socialism of *The Liberator* with the celebrated radical protest of *If We Must Die*; and followed that adventuresome flourish, still with his tongue in his cheek, to Moscow and the lavish hospitality

and hero-worship of the Third Comintern. Then by a sudden repudiation there was a prolonged flight into expatriate cosmopolitanism and its irresponsible exoticisms. Even Mc Kay admits the need for some apologia at this point. Granting, for the sake of argument, that the "adventure in Russia" and the association with *The Liberator* were not commitments to some variety of socialism (of this, the author says:—"I had no radical party affiliations, and there was no reason why I should consider myself under any special obligations to the Communists . . . I had not committed myself to anything. I had remained a free agent . . .") what, we may reasonably ask, about the other possible loyalty, on the basis of which the Russian ovation had been earned, viz,—the spokesmanship for the proletarian Negro? In the next breath, literally the next paragraph, Mc Kay repudiates that also in the sentence we have already quoted:—"I was not aware, at the moment of writing, that I was transformed into a medium to express a mass sentiment." Yet the whole adventuresome career between 1918 and 1922, alike in Bohemian New York, literary Harlem and revolutionary Moscow, was predicated upon this assumed representativeness, cleverly exploited. One does not know whether to recall Peter before the triple cock-crow or Paul's dubious admonition about being "all things to all men". Finally, in the face of the obvious Bohemianism of the wanderings on the Riviera and in Morocco, we find Mc Kay disowning common cause with the exotic cosmopolitans,—“my white fellow-expatriates”, and claiming that “color-consciousness was the fundamental of my restlessness”. Yet from this escapist escapade, we find our prodigal racist returning expecting the fatted calf instead of the birch-rod, with a curtain lecture on “race salvation” from within and the necessity for a “Negro Messiah”, whose glory he would like to celebrate “in a monument of verse”.

Even a fascinating style and the naivest egotism cannot cloak such inconsistency or condone such lack of common loyalty. One may not dictate a man's loyalties, but must, at all events, expect him to have some. For a genius maturing in a decade of racial self-expression and enjoying the fruits of it all and living into a

decade of social issues and conflict and aware of all that, to have repudiated all possible loyalties amounts to self-imposed apostasy. Mc Kay is after all the dark-skinned psychological twin of that same Frank Harris, whom he so cleverly portrays and caricatures; a versatile genius caught in the ego-centric predicament of aesthetic vanity and exhibitionism. And so, he stands to date, the *enfant terrible* of the Negro Renaissance, where with a little loyalty and consistency he might have been at least its Villon and perhaps its Voltaire.

If this were merely an individual fate, it could charitably go unnoticed. But in some vital sense these aberrations of spirit, this lack of purposeful and steady loyalty of which Mc Kay is the supreme example have to a lesser extent vitiated much of the talent of the first generation of "New Negro" writers and artists. They inherited, it is true, a morbid amount of decadent aestheticism, which they too uncritically imitated. They also had to reckon with "shroud of color". To quote Countee Cullen, they can be somewhat forgiven for "sailing the doubtful seas" and for being tardily, and in some cases only half-heartedly led "to live persuaded by their own". But, with all due allowances, there was an unpardonable remainder of spiritual truancy and social irresponsibility. The folk have rarely been treated by these artists with unalloyed reverence and unselfish loyalty. The commitment to racial materials and "race expression" should be neither that of a fashionable and profitable fad nor of a condescending and missionary duty. The one great flaw of the first decade of the Negro Renaissance was its exhibitionist flair. It should have addressed itself more to the people themselves and less to the gallery of faddist Negrophiles. The task confronting the present younger generation of Negro writers and artists is to approach the home scene and the folk with high seriousness, deep loyalty, racial reverence of the unspectacular, unmelodramatic sort, and when necessary, sacrificial social devotion. They must purge this flippant exhibitionism, this posy but not too sincere racialism, this care-free and irresponsible individualism.

The program of the Negro Renaissance was to interpret the folk to itself, to vitalize it from within; it was a wholesome, vigorous, assertive racialism, even if not explicitly proletarian in conception and justification. Mc Kay himself yearns for some such thing, no doubt, when he speaks in his last chapter of the Negro's need to discover his "group soul". A main aim of the New Negro movement will be unrealized so long as that remains undiscovered and dormant; and it is still the task of the Negro writer to be a main agent in evoking it, even if the added formula of proletarian art be necessary to cure this literary anaemia and make our art the nourishing life blood of the people rather than the caviar and cake of the artists themselves. Negro writers must become truer sons of the people, more loyal providers of spiritual bread and less aesthetic wastrels and truants of the streets.

*Alain Locke*

## THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. \$2.00.

Zora Neale Hurston's writing career stretches over a period of twelve years. During this time her talent for putting words together has become more and more developed, until, with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, there can be no doubt that she is an excellent story-teller.

This latest novel is smoothly written and easily readable, combining the best features of Miss Hurston's earlier work, and retaining the author's deliberate detachment from preachments and interpretations in terms of the social conditions of her characters. Different in style from *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Mules and Men*, the story of Janie is told within a framework which utilizes folk knowledge and beliefs in the well-written conversation in dialect.

By virtue of her natural talent and her training in anthropology, Miss Hurston has carried to conclusive achievement the



maxim that every good ethnologist must be an intimate and accepted member of the group he is dealing with. Out of the South herself, she has an understanding and knowledge of Negroes which make her able to enter one particular segment of life at the point where she can best probe its reality. There are times, however, when she does this with a lightness which has resulted in the criticism that she uses her story-telling and showmanship ability to exaggerate for a white audience intent upon sensational details regarding the lives of Negroes.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* is primarily the story of Janie, a mulatto, who goes through a progression of three marriages. The first, contracted through her grandmother, is abruptly and deliberately terminated by Janie. The second marriage is with Jody Starks, future mayor of an all-Negro town. The relationship promises the happiness upon which Janie has set her soul, but that promise dies long before the death of Jody. The third marriage is with Tea Cake, who is to Janie the embodiment and symbol of all that is youthful and representative of the life she wants so much.

With each new relationship, the scene changes. (The story throughout is laid in Florida.) From small-scale, precarious farm life to independent living in an entirely Negro community to working "on de muck", Janie lives through a progressive shifting of details picturing the limitations of Negro existence in the South. While Miss Hurston has consistently presented the efforts of her characters to live without showing their relation to the whole of southern life and practices, this sometime understatement and more often avoidance implies much of what the writer with no aversion to being called "social conscious" would make explicit.

The execution of the novel is superbly done. In less capable hands the description of the hurricane, and the actions and motivations of the characters throughout that period of destruction would have been fantastic and far-fetched. As it is, from the time when



Tea Cake is bitten by a mad dog at the beginning of the hurricane until his violent death a few weeks later, the events move dramatically and believably to the climax.

There are many things, apparently incidental, which are pellets of meaning. For example, only a few lines are devoted to the "saws" in the Florida everglades, but we are given insight into the undifferentiated attitude of many American Negroes toward the West Indian Negro. Life and work in the 'glades reveal the strong caste feelings within the Negro group itself. The caste-color relationship is shown through Mrs. Turner's (a lunchroom proprietress of light skin) attitude toward "common niggers" and an awareness of the meaning behind her expression, "Ah never dreamt so many different kins uh black folks could colleck in one place".

Miss Hurston's characters say these things, but she makes no attempt to interpret them. They pile up as a result of spatial in-breeding within the boundaries of the South where tradition is imposed and static. They are the active residue of plantation attitudes passed from whites to blacks regarding the status of mulattoes.

The use of force to make Negroes clean up the Florida towns after the hurricane is the point at which Negro-white relationships receive more than a brief comment. Tea Cake is forced to help clear the dead from the streets although he is "uh workin' man wid money" in his pocket. There is bitterness in his reaction to his compulsory activity, and one wonders that there is no elaboration of thought or act to involve change which would vitiate the habit of employment without consent. The incident is there and the seeds of action are there, but neither the characters nor their creator spade the earth. Here one wishes that Miss Hurston had allowed Janie and Tea Cake to be less in love for enough paragraphs to show more fully the depth of this bitter reaction.

The poetry and imagery of the dialect are beautiful. There is a feeling on the part of the reader that in this idiom of the

South he is close to the social roots of language. The experiences related are Janie's and Tea Cake's, but the human emotions and aspirations are those of any man's and any woman's anywhere in the world. There is no doubt that Miss Hurston has written unself-consciously. Since she does this so well, it does not seem too much to ask that she turn her objectivity to the inclusion of newer interpretations of the Negro's heritage.

M. M.

## NEW SONG OF AMERICA

*American Stuff*, an anthology by writers on the Federal Writers' Projects. New York: Viking Press \$2.00.

Easily the most significant production of the Federal Writers Project is *American Stuff* (Viking Press, \$2.00), an anthology of Americana, folk material and creative work. The first volume of creative work sponsored by the project, *American Stuff* is at once complete justification of the project's objectives and refutation of that criticism which has branded it as a wasteful boondoggle.

*American Stuff* is the lusty voice of America singing throughout the vastness which is this country, singing more particularly the song "of the less prosperous millions" as Henry G. Alsberg, the project's national director, asserts in a foreword. It is a song sometimes bitter, but seldom despairing; sometimes vibrant with soul-stirring joy, but seldom gay with laughter. A song of all the peoples of America: seafaring folk of New England, black peasants in the cotton fields of Dixie, Anglo-Saxon mountaineers stranded for generations in the uplands of West Virginia, European immigrants seeking the new life, Mexicans in the Southwest fostering the ancient culture of old Spain.

An anthology, *American Stuff* shares the fault of unevenness common to such volumes. But packed between its covers are poetry and prose of genuine merit. Thirty-seven writers have contributed to this omnibus. Contributors to the volume include many of established reputation like Harry Kemp, Claude McKay, Travis Hoke,

Raymond Larsson, Sterling Brown, Edwin Bjorkman and Nathan Asch. Others are newcomers, some of exceptional talent like Richard Wright, Ida Faye Sachs and Jim Thompson. And in addition, there are the folk contributions, the accumulated songs and lore of the people of America.

It is noteworthy that this volume should include in no small measure the contributions of Negro writers on the project, as well as a generous share of the rich folk material of the race. It is recognition of the Negro's substantial contribution to the culture of the Nation.

The stark realism which characterizes the volume is in no instance more cogently illustrated than in the work of two of the Negro contributors: Sterling A. Brown and Richard Wright. Mr. Brown's poem, ironically entitled, *All are Gay*, is a ringing indictment of a social system which exalts killers, perpetuates slums, and warps the minds and bodies of children before they've really tasted life.

In *The Ethics of Living Jim Crow*, Mr. Wright depicts the bitter aspects of being black in America. It is a terrifying picture which he presents out of his own experience, the terror of which is immeasurably enhanced by the singularly dispassionate style in which he details one incredible horror after another. It is an unforgettable picture of life in the Deep South.

Other contributions by Negro writers include verse by Claude McKay and Robert E. Hayden and a sketch by Eluard Luchell McDaniel. There are also market songs collected in Harlem by Frank Byrd, and spirituals, work songs, folk tales, and "phrases of the people" collected in the South.

*American Stuff* is a volume which anyone interested in the authentic stuff of America should have on his shelf.

Henry Lee Moon

## CREATIVE AND CULTURAL LAG

*These Low Grounds*, by Waters Edward Turpin. New York: Harper and Brothers. \$2.50.

In *These Low Grounds*, Waters Edward Turpin's first novel, we have the first attempt by an American Negro to essay a saga, and it is for this reason, if for no other, that Turpin's book merits reading.

We are given a depiction of the lives of four generations of a Negro family which spans the period from the Civil War to the present. We are introduced to house servants, farmers, barbers, bawdy house keepers, church functionaries, cooks, stage entertainers, and a Negro army officer of the World War, along with contemporary young Negro college men, women and teachers. There is a certain realism demanded by the types Turpin has sought to portray. This realism which demands sincerity on the part of a writer has been missing in the work of a great many of those who have preceded Turpin.

Carrie and Jim Prince are excellent southern types. In selecting such characters, and such a setting as the farming, oystering, and crabbing region of Maryland, Turpin shows a willingness to explore the rich deep materials of the Negro which have long been neglected by Negro writers. In such a region life emerges sharp and clear in its outlines, forceful and blunt in its impact, and is as real as good rich black earth, and as free of superficialities. For the most part this material and these characters, along with their urban counterparts: the roustabouts, suds busters, bell boys, shoe-shine boys, coal men, ditch diggers and such, have been neglected by the "New Negro" school of writers.

It is in the first half of the book, wherein Turpin deals with the South, that the characters are most successful in their efforts to spring to life. We are given mere sketches of those of the North, and much of this in undigested lumps.

There are potentially statuesque characters in *These Low Grounds*. Many of them struggle to achieve life, but are stillborn when they arrive. They are carried through the period of Reconstruction with no mention of the fact. They transverse the distance from birth to death with but the most superficial motivation. Through the device of labeling, the characters suffer, and consequently all seem to possess the same reaction to life, the same psychology; all of which bespeaks a certain lack of historical and political consciousness.

In such times as these when writers all over the world are alert to social and historical processes and are aroused to the point of holding a writers' congress in a war torn area, no author can afford to remain untouched by the activity about him. It is the Negro writer's responsibility, as one identified with a repressed minority, to utilize yet transcend his immediate environment and grasp the historic process as a whole, and his, and his group's relation to it. This cannot be accomplished with dull sensibilities, or by lagging in the cultural, technical or political sense.

With a greater development in technique, Turpin could have given us more than one level of writing. He would have entered into the consciousness of his characters to give us a fuller picture of human beings. People like Carrie and Jim *know* that life for Negroes in their situation is not as simple as Turpin would have us believe, and a closer examination of their consciousness would have thrown into relief many of the social and emotional factors present.

It is not necessary for an author to adopt contemporary technical devices to produce novels of distinction. However, Mr. Turpin's failure to make use of these devices, and the resulting weaknesses of *These Low Grounds*, suggest that he might profit by a closer acquaintance with the techniques of his contemporaries since their problems are his, and their achievements similar to those he seeks.

Ralph Ellison

Ed's. Note: The following letter is one of a series written by a Louisiana share-cropper over a period of a year to union headquarters. This correspondence was given to one of the editors. Space permits the publishing of only one of these authentic word-pictures of share-cropper life.

December 10, 1936.

Dear — — — :

They say that Gradnigo Island was a white settlement. The land belongs mostly to white but the tenants have always been colored. It wasn't till the big war that they put the road through and a few whites bought small farms. Before that the X family owned all this country and used just colored hands. There are very few grown white men born from.....on northwest from here for seven or eight miles. I know because I was born about a mile from here. My grandmother and grandfather were slaves on the old X plantation.

The government man was here yesterday and asked me a lot of questions about how much cotton I gathered and how many kids I got. He told me the organizer was going to get in trouble. He said "You got your notice yesterday from Mr. Y." I said yes but Mr. Z is my boss and he told me when I got my settlement that they was going to run it just like it had been and that they wasn't going to hurt none of us. He said "Yes, but you better move or the sheriff will come and take your stuff and load it up and throw it in the road." I said alright when they do it I said I'll go with it.

The only thing that made me sorry was when the world was in war before, they picked us up and registered us and sent us to war to fight for our country. Now the country is quieted down and steady and the government doing with us just like a man would do with a old poor dog. If they was going to fight again we would sit right here.

I talked pretty straight with him but a man in my fix can't talk crooked.

.....

Tenant on .....farm.



## CONTRIBUTORS

BENJAMIN APPEL, author of a new novel, *The Runaround*, is well-known as a left-wing writer . . . VERNA ARVEY has contributed to the *Etude*, the *Musical Courier*, and similar publications. She is a Californian . . . STERLING A. BROWN, the author of *Southern Road* and a forthcoming volume of verse, *No Hiding Place*, is a Guggenheim Fellow for 1937. He has been acting as Editor on Negro Affairs, Federal Writers' Project, and is also an Associate Professor of English at Howard University . . . FRANK MARSHALL DAVIS is a Rosenwald Fellow for 1937. He is feature editor for the Associated Negro Press. His second published book of poems is *I Am the American Negro* . . . ROBERT DAVIS is a young Chicago poet who is working with the Chicago group. He is on the Federal Writers' Project . . . OWEN DODSON has appeared in the old *Challenge*. He is a New Yorker, now a student at the Yale School of Dramatics . . . RALPH ELLISON is a former student of Tuskegee Institute. He is now in New York . . . CHARLES HENRI FORD is the former editor of *Caravel*, a magazine of Spain published in America until the Spanish civil war made its publication impossible . . . CLARENCE HILL is a New Yorker who appears in *New Challenge* under a pseudonym . . . VALDEMAR HILL, a West Indian writer, appeared in the last issue of *Challenge* . . . EUGENE HOLMES, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, is rapidly becoming known as one of the best of the younger critics . . . LANGSTON HUGHES, the poet and story-teller, is well remembered for *The Ways of White Folks*. The translation which appears in this issue was sent us just before he sailed for Spain to attend the International Writers' Congress . . . ALLYN KEITH is the pseudonym of a young writer who is a member of the writers' group in Chicago . . . GEORGE B. LINN is a native of Wyoming and has lived there all his life. He is a former member of the Timber Workers' Union, and an alumni member of Thorne Rune of the American College Quill Club . . . ALAIN LOCKE, Professor of Philosophy at Howard University, was the chronicler of the "New Negro"

movement ten years ago . . . NORMAN MACLEOD is well-known as a poet. He is now in New York, having recently and without regret returned from the South . . . HENRY LEE MOON is at present a writer on the Federal Writers' Project in New York City. He is one of the ablest of the Negro journalists . . . MARGARET WALKER appears for the first time in print in *New Challenge*. She is a member of the Chicago writers' group, and is at present on the Federal Writers' Project there . . .



